Je est un autre: Multiple Selves in Autobiographical Fictions

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

in

English (Literary Studies)

August 2004

Abstract of thesis entitled:

***Je est un autre*: Multiple Selves in Autobiographical Fictions**

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For the degree of Master of Philosophy in English (Literary Studies)

At The Chinese University of Hong Kong in August 2004

The definition of autobiography, in the literal meaning of the word, is divided into its three parts: 'auto', 'bio', 'graphy' – 'self-life-writing'. The focus of debate has shifted from *bios* to *autos*—from the life to the self—in autobiographical criticism in recent decades. In the contextualization of autobiography in individualism, the concept of truth of self takes on the notion of truth of the individual. It is modified as the concept of fictions of self/self as fiction as the debate shifts to the autobiography's claim to referentiality. The concept of self as fiction also directs one to a new conception of subjectivity in the autobiographical genre, as the self is considered not only a fiction but also an articulation of subjectivity of other discourses that constitute the self. The relationality of self and life writing becomes the focus of the debate, as the Other makes a more prominent presence in the definition of self in the genre.

Based on the changing conception of self in autobiographical criticism, this thesis explores the use of multiple selves in autobiographical fictions in Philip Roth's *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*, Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*, which employ a series of fictive selves to construct the autobiographical selves. The concept of *je est un autre* is embedded in the use of fictive selves in the context of this thesis: the authors of my texts

transform themselves into a fictive persona who narrates the autobiography, or one of the characters who narrates the stories of both himself and his others. The discussion of the three texts is an examination of the changing conception of self in the autobiographical genre, from the nature of self as autonomous to the self as inter-subjective and relational. The distinction between self and other is ultimately invalidated, as the stories of different selves share the same form of truth or the impossibility of the truth; or as self and the world comes into a synthesis in the textual universe of one's creation, where the autobiographer is united with or immersed in his others.

Starting with the question of how the autobiographer communicates the truth about himself, the thesis explores the multiple selves in autobiographical fictions and arrives at the notion *je est un autre* as the answer.

論文摘要

自傳的定義，在於‘自我’，‘人生’，‘寫作’。在近年的文學評論中，‘自我’爲自傳的重點。而‘自我’也轉化成個人的真理及虛構的自我這概念。自傳的參照價值也令人聯想到人主觀的定義，因個人主觀是由他人的主觀構成的。

根據‘自我’概念的轉變，本論文研究自傳式小說中複數自我的運用，包括菲利普·羅斯的《事實·一小說家的自傳》，米蘭·昆德拉的《笑忘書》，保羅·奧斯特的《孤寂的創造》。各小說均採用複數及虛構的自我，作爲作家表達自我的媒介，包含著他人爲自我的概念。各自我表達共同的真理，自我與他人融合爲一，而自我也由自主演變成由他人介定。

由自傳作家如何表達自我這問題出發，本論文探討複數自我在自傳小說中的運用, 而‘他人爲自我’這概念正是答案。

Chapter One

Introduction

The definition of autobiography, in the literal meaning of the word, is divided into its three parts: 'auto', 'bio', 'graphy' – 'self-life-writing'. In his essay 'Autobiography and Cultural Moment', James Olney revisits the definition of the genre and discusses the shift of attention from bios to autos—from the life to the self—in autobiographical criticism in recent decades. Much of the early criticism on the autobiographical mode focuses on the *bios*, the assumption that autobiography could signify the course of a lifetime or at least a significant portion of the life. Such an assumption created the questions over 'truth' in the autobiographical genre: the questions of self-definition, self-existence, or self-deception, of whether the autobiographer deliberately alters details of his life in the writing. The turning to *autos* provided an answer to this question in autobiographical criticism, as the self is seen to have its own reason and its truth. The question remains whether life and self exist as completed, defined entities or whether they come into being through the act of writing. The special interest critics have taken in autobiography, in Olney's conclusion, springs from one's fascination with the self and its 'profound, its endless mysteries'; and the study of autobiography is the examination of how the self 'defines itself from moment to moment amid the buzz and confusion of the external world as a security against [the] outside whirl' (Olney 'Autobiography and Cultural Moment, 19-24). Olney's conception of a transcendent subject in autobiography echoes the existentialist self conceived by Gusdorf. The emphasis on unity of self is also a product of the contextualization of autobiography in individualism: the creation and presentation of the individual as a unique, autonomous being, whose truth contains value on its own

and is a contribution to the world one lives in. The emphasis on the truth of self is transformed into the concept of fictions of self/self as fiction, which becomes an important defense for autobiography's claim to referentiality. The concept of self as fiction contributes to further changes in the conception of subjectivity in the autobiographical genre, as the self is not only a fiction but an articulation of subjectivity of other discourses that constitute the self. The relational nature of self and life writing is given a much stronger emphasis as the Other makes a more prominent presence in the definition of self in the autobiographical genre.

The shifting of focus from *bios* to *autos* in autobiographical criticism is also evident in the changes in forms of autobiographical writings in the last few decades. The notion of self/self as fictions, for example, has opened door for autobiographical writings in which the truth of the author's story is communicated through fictions, such as *So Long, See You Tomorrow* by William Maxwell. Based on the changing conception of self in autobiographical criticism, this thesis explores the issue of self-presence and self-creation through multiple selves in autobiographical fictions under the light of *je est un autre*: the speaking of oneself as other. The texts chosen for this study are Philip Roth's *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*, Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*, on the ground that these texts explore the issue of how one presents one's self – an interiority – through the interaction of multiple and fictive selves. The term 'multiple selves', when applied to my chosen texts, includes both the autobiographical selves and the fictive selves of the authors' creation. All selves are mutually interactive and constructive, and the autobiographical selves are created through collisions with its others in the autobiographical fictions. The

concept *je est un autre* is embedded in the concept of fictions of self/self as fiction in its different facets in the context of this thesis: the authors of my texts, as autobiographers, explicitly transforms themselves into a fictive persona who narrates the autobiography, or one of the characters who narrates the stories of both oneself and his others; and the fictions of the authors' life is speculated or revealed through the fictions of other selves in the texts. The choice of these texts is, more importantly, grounded in their demonstration of the changing conception of self in autobiographical criticism: from contextualization of autobiography in individualism, to the nature of self as inter-subjective or relational, the three texts provide examples of autobiographers' attempts in defining themselves through writing. The fictions of selves are constructed in the narratives to highlight the nature of self as multiple, as each of the texts is a composite of other texts. The distinction between self and other is ultimately invalidated, as the stories of different selves share the same form of truth or the impossibility of the truth; or as self and the world come into a synthesis in the textual universe of one's creation, where the autobiographer is united with or immersed in his others.

To provide an overview of the thesis, this chapter is devoted to the discussion of the theoretical framework – the changing conception of self in autobiographical criticism – the study is placed in. The relationship between autobiography and individualism is discussed from the perspective of unity of self in autobiographical criticism. The concept fictions of self/self as fiction is explored from a similar angle, with a special focus on the possible abuse of the notion of the truth of self. The fictiveness of self – both as the writing persona and the written self in the text – brings our discussion to the problem of

referentiality in autobiographical writings, and points to the conception of self as multiple and relational in nature.

Unity of Self and Individualism

In the chapter titled 'Autobiography and historical consciousness' in *Auto/biographical discourses: theory, criticism, practice*, Laura Marcus traces the development of criticism on autobiography along the line of 'liberal pessimism', to which a 'decline' model of autobiographical history is central, and in which dominant conceptions of individualism are conflated with autobiographical representations (Marcus 135). At the beginning of the line is Wilhelm Dilthey, whose hermeneutics, with their emphasis on unity and coherence as fundamental principles, prefigure the critical and conceptual focus which has come to largely dominate the critical field of autobiographical studies (148). Georg Misch, adopts a similar position in his *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, in which the self-identity of author and subject is the essential definition of autobiography as a genre. As Marcus points out, the importance of author-subject identity for Misch is primarily that it secures the same intrinsic unity and coherence individual lives are considered to possess (149-50):

> ...the man who sets out to write the story of his own life has it in view as a whole, with a unity and direction and a significance of its own. In this single whole the facts and feelings, actions and reactions, recalled by the authors...all have their definite place, thanks to their significance in relation to the whole...This knowledge, which enables the writer to conceive his life as a single

> whole, has grown in the course of his life out of his actual experience (qtd. in Marcus 150)

For Misch, the question of fact in autobiography is replaced by the quest for coherence, and subjective truth acquires the status of objective truth. One could find echoes of Misch's thoughts in Georges Gusdorf's influential essay, in which he lays out several presuppositions of the writing of autobiography, the most prominent one being existential anxiety. The proper task of autobiography is to reconstruct the unity of life, as the autobiographer achieves his 'special unity and identity across time': 'to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and regroup them in a comprehensive sketch…[the autobiographer] strains towards a complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny' (Gusdorf 35). Gusdorf also claims autobiography to be 'one of the means to self-knowledge thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality', and it reveals '[my] individual unity, the mysterious essence of my being' (37). In this context, autobiography provides more the path to self-redemption than to self-knowledge, as one sets out to recover the elements that have constituted his destiny, upon realizing how all lives are 'inwardly botched' (39). Autobiography acquires a privileged status as it is 'a second reading of experience', and truth emerges in this reading (37). Truth in autobiography is a 'more profound sense of truth as an expression of inmost being' in one's present consciousness (38). For both Misch and Gusdorf, the autobiography's task is to capture the truth of self of the autobiographer, since autobiography springs from one's self-awareness and subsequently one's need of self-assertion.

One of the implications in the writings of Misch and Gusdorf is the relationship between autobiography as a form and individualism as an ideology. As subjective truth is

elevated to the status of objective truth, autobiographies demonstrate the coherence and consistency in and of the development of Western man and can be seen as a celebration of autonomous individualism (Marcus 153). This line of thought was developed by critics as Roy Pascal and Karl Weintraub, who represent 'an orthodox line of liberal cultural criticism' (Marcus 154) and emphasize the synthesis between individualism and historical consciousness. In *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, Pascal formulates his conception of the inter-relationship between self and the world and between past and present:

> ...the center of interest [in autobiography] is the self...though necessarily the outside world must appear so that, in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape. The writing of autobiography imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of a coherent story...in every case it is [the writer's] present position which enables him to see his life as something of a unity (9)

Adopting a similar position as Misch's and Gusdorf's, Pascal asserts the evidence of a personality to be the truth in autobiography, and the unity of the text is a precondition of this evidence. One must see the development of personality in stages, as historical consistency can reveal the true evidence of the personality even if psychological consistency is not immediately apparent. There is also 'a failure' if an autobiography does not bring home to the readers the present situation of the autobiographer, or if the personality in the autobiography appears trivial, since they are the criterion by which we understand and/or even judge an autobiography (9). Pascal's emphasis on the present perspective of the autobiographer's is shared by Weintraub, who writes 'the retrospective perspective, as well as the author's motivation and intention for writing must be

recaptured for a proper understanding of the autobiographical effort' (*The Value of The Individual* xviii). In his essay 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness', Weintraub specifies this perspective as 'a moment of crisis or beyond an experience, or a cumulative set of experiences which can play the same function as a crisis' in the autobiographer's life, since the readers can only understand the pattern and meaning of the life recounted from this standpoint (825-6). Weintraub's formulation of the 'moment of crisis' authorizes the present standpoint as an enlightened one, one that illuminates the true meaning of the autobiographer's life as it has never before. The presence of this present standpoint authorizes the version of personality being presented, which communicates the inner core of the autobiographer.

Autobiography, in Pascal's discussion, is considered to have been inspired by a 'reverence for self': the individual feels responsible for himself and thus traces his self in its 'delicate uniqueness', as well as its 'historical identity, in all its particularity' (181). Ideally, autobiography involves an interplay between self and the world through which the self comes into being, one that is most effective in Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, where the '[history] of self and history of the world are inextricably linked' (Weintraub 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness' 847). Pascal communicates similar sentiments in his statement about the 'decisive achievement' of autobiography: 'to give us events that are symbolic of the personality as an entity unfolding not solely according to its own laws, but also in response to the world it lives in' (185). The relationship between the individual and the world ultimately points to the truth of self in the text, since the autobiographer's self is expressed in his personality as it appears to the world. Such conception should ideally place autobiography in the 'outside' world as much as the

'inner' world of the individual, and contribute to the genre's status as literature through which both writers and readers know life. It seems to be Pascal has in mind when he proposes autobiography is a form of 'active contribution', as the autobiographer presents an order of values that is his own (193). Pascal's ideas have their repercussions in *The Value of the Individual*, where Weintraub discusses a modern historical outlook that places 'immense value on the specific goodness of each individually specified expression of the human experience':

> Man, however limited he might be in each distinct formulation of his being, redeemed himself by the successive actualizations of his indefinitely variable potential. Each style of life has its own intrinsic justification; each has the right to be understood in its own terms; each deserves loving attention as another human search for humanity. History thus becomes the passing scene of possible human forms (xii)

The relationship between individual and the world is modified by Weintraub to be one of mutual influence: the individual is seen to adhere to 'great personality ideals in which their culture tends to embody its values and objectives', and on the other hand, to hold onto 'a commitment to a self for which there is no model' (xvi). In Weintraub's formulation, the self-representation of the autobiographer necessarily embodies the spirit of his time, and the writing of his life story contributes to the understanding of the spectrum of individuality and history. Such assumption would no longer hold if the value of the individual is developed to the extreme – it is easy for an individual to indulge in the uniqueness of his existence but not for him or her to recognize the existence of another individual to be equally unique. The 'greatly enriched view of humanity' could

turn reductive, as the 'task of self-exploration and self-definition can consume life to the danger point of morbid self-inspection and egocentricism' (xii-xvi). The notion of the truth of self is thus potentially self-undermining, since it may lead to an overt emphasis on interiority of the autobiographers, to the point where the external world does not exist. Such autobiographies lose their value as documents of individuality, since the concept of individuality would no longer hold when the individual is blind to the world.

Fictions of Self/Self as Fiction

The relationship between autobiography and individualism seems to weigh less in later autobiographical criticism, as the debate shifts to the use of fictions in autobiography and the genre's claim to referentiality. The concept of fictions of self/self as fictions, however, is essentially a modification of the views of earlier critics' who see the coherence of life story as the blueprint of the truth of the autobiographer. The later critics who argue for fictions of self/self as fiction are in fact defending unity of self from another perspective, as they assert autobiography's task is to capture one's inner reality and fictions enable the autobiographer to achieve psychological unity. The present standpoint of the autobiographer continues to occupy a central place in autobiographical criticism, as it allows the autobiographer to negotiate between his past and his present and to reconstruct his life story according to his present identity. The union of past self and present self, or of conflicting selves at different points of time in one's life, is a fiction that is certified as one of the major achievements of the autobiographical genre. The relationship self and the world more explicitly favors the former, as the truth of one's inner world is legitimized as the autobiographical truth one seeks.

The use of fictions in autobiography is endowed with an ethical dimension if one shares Fyre's view: 'in the form of representational fiction', autobiography assigns motives, causes and effects 'according to our best lights rather than according to the absolute truth' (151). For critics such as Kermode and Olney, fictions are necessary constructs that protect humans from the whirl of the outside world. In his first book on autobiography, *Metaphors of Self*, Olney stresses the inter-relationship between self and the world: one explores the world and finds it in himself, as the two share the same metaphysics and merge in his consciousness (14). Autobiography captures the life of the autobiographer, which is a 'vertical thrust' down to the 'roots of individual being' rather than a 'horizontal thrust from the present into the past' (Olney 'The Ontology of Autobiography' 239-41). The truth of one's consciousness thus seems to embody the truth of both 'inner' and 'outer' world. Olney's brand of transcendental subjectivism may not apply to most contemporary autobiographies, but the privileging of subjectivism is central to critics who see fictions of self as the autobiographical truth. In *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Paul John Eakin conceives the autobiographer's self or his life of consciousness to be the referent in autobiography. As self becomes the referent in the text, the fictions he constructs about himself are the truth about his life or self. Fiction can acquire the status of fact – the fact of the life of consciousness – since the text is the site where the autobiographer negotiates the terms of his psychological reality. Fiction provides 'a privileged bridge of discourse of the self with itself across lapsing time', and autobiography is essentially a kind of 'existential fiction' (24). Autobiography is a ceaseless process of identity formation in which new versions of the past evolve to meet the constantly changing requirements of the self in

each successive present, and the manifestation of an underlying psychological unity to which it ostensibly refers (36). The autobiographical self is an invention of the narrative, and does not otherwise exist.

Eakin's conception frees the autobiographer from the question of factuality, and develops earlier critics' concept of self as fiction. By seeing autobiography as a kind of 'existential fiction', a site where the autobiographer can invent and re-invent his identity, the split between the writing self and his written selves, or between one written self and another becomes the motivation for re-invention. Differences and shifts in identities can be seen as one of the many negotiations the autobiographer undertakes, who now has greater authority and freedom over his self-representation. The conception of autobiographical self as an invention also defends the autobiographer from the charges of fictionalization, if essence of his self-presentation – his self – is necessarily fictive in nature. In his next book *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*, which focuses on the externally referential in the genre, Eakin refines his view on unity of self: the bridging of past and present represents 'the fulfillment of a wish to be present once more to one's past, such that the telltate marks of temporal, psychological, and linguistic discontinuity paradoxically facilitate belief in continuity of identity, belief in the notion that the present self can establish direct contact with the [earlier] self from the past' (35). Eakin's conclusion is insightful for discussing the writers included in his books, such as Mary McCarthy, Henry James and Sartre, but I have reservations about whether it would be as illuminating if one discusses lesser writers under the same light. The writers in Eakin's discussion would be, in Mandel's words, autobiographers who trust their experience to illuminate the significance behind pictures of their memories in the context

of their total experience, and transform them in their autobiographies as existential fiction (Mandel 52). One might argue for the notion that written self or selves in an autobiography reveal the truth about the autobiographer at the moment of writing, but it does not necessarily bridge the gap between the two: the gap could be exaggerated when a reader sees the autobiographer struggling to bridge or even obliterate it. The 'truth of man' may stand, but it remains unsettling for the readers when they sense a significant difference between the autobiographer's truth and the truth we perceive. The privileging of subjective truth is meant to establish the platform of communication between the writer and his readers and between the writer and himself, so that the truth of the autobiographer can be shared, understood and empathized. When the autobiographer borders on self-deception in his autobiographical enterprise, his interiority is concealed by and lost in his lies, rather than portrayed and preserved in the text. The concept of self as invention in autobiography is potentially self-reductive, when one exploits the emphasis on interiority as the tool of self-glorification.

Fictionality,Referentiality,Relationality

As I mentioned in my introductory paragraphs of this chapter, the central question of this thesis is how the autobiographer communicates his self, and my answer is *je est un autre*. The concept of the autobiographer speaking as another is nothing new in autobiographical criticism, as he/she is necessarily bound by the problem of split intentionality. In his essay 'The Veto of Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography', Louis A. Renza outlines the paradox of self-abnegation: as the 'I' becomes a 'he', how can the autobiographer continue to claim this existence as his own, and that his 'I' is a secure

referential source for his writing? (279). Renze attempts to draw, from his careful examination of the relationship between split intentionality and different modes of autobiography, the conclusion that autobiography is neither fact nor fiction—not even a mixture of the two (273). The autobiographer is separated from the 'referent' in the text, since 'the nature of autobiographical writing precludes the possibility that the writer can deliberately adopt a persona behind which he conceals references to his own life', and the materials are potentially unverifiable for the autobiographer, who is now reading his 'other', one that he 'intends' as he writes (292). Although Renza criticizes critics such as Olney who see autobiography as 'definitions of the self at the moment of writing' of their 'genre nominalism', his conclusion of autobiography being 'a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self-representation' may not be as different from the views he criticizes as he insists (274, 295). Renza's conclusion, in a way, echoes the view of autobiography as self-invention: the written self is one invented as the autobiographer writes, a view commonly held by critics who defend the use of fictions in autobiography. The conception of such a view, however, has its roots in seeing self as the referent in autobiography: the truth of self is captured in fiction, and such truth cannot be questioned since it is necessarily true about the autobiographer at the moment of writing.

Renza's article is important to the conception of my argument in this thesis, since the major question I address is the possibility of presenting one's interiority in writing. According to the deconstructionist argument, the self is only ostensibly presented by the subject in the autobiographical narrative, and both 'self' and 'subject' are narrative constructions. While the deconstructionists criticize earlier critics' demand for unity and

emphasize the self as de-centered, one might recall how Gusdorf and others have also proposed that self, or individual destiny, is made up of scattered elements that find their realization in writing. In *Derrida and Autobiography*, Robert Smith pinpoints the nature of self-representation as a matter of the subject telling its story to itself:

> autobiography begins with self-colloquy, writing to the self in an internal vocative mode...autobiography can take the form of self-enclosure, but it can only do so when the subject has first effected a minimal distancing of the self in order to address it (Smith 63).

One is again reminded of Gusdorf's essay, in which he states how one must take a certain distance from oneself in an autobiographical act, though such distancing is a means of achieving the special unity of the self for earlier critics. The distance between writing self and its written self points to a series of questions regarding the referentiality of self: is communication between oneself and his/her self possible? How can autobiography claim to present the self, if self exists as a non-textual interiority within the autobiographer? Is there such interiority within oneself as an intrinsic entity, and what constitutes it? How does one read the self through reference to it, or what claim to referentiality does the self have when it is a fiction itself? In 'Fictions of Self: The End of Autobiography', Michael Sprinker announces:

> ...the self can no more be author of its own discourse than any producer of a text can be called the author—that is the originator—of his own writing... Every text is an articulation of the relations between texts, a product of intertextuality, a waving together of what has been produced elsewhere in discontinuous form; every subject, every author, every self is the articulation of an

> intersubjectivity structured within and around the discourses available to it at any moment in time (325).

The title of Sprinker's essay ostensibly summarizes the fate of autobiography in the age of postmodernism and deconstruction. Autobiography as a self-referential document is somehow untenable as the self is constituted by others, though an altered notion of self or subjectivity can engender an altered conception of the genre. In 'Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism', Candace Lang discusses the fragility of the distinction between subject and other—of self and other, individuality and collective—and concludes:

> To write, be it in the form of a self-referential first-person discourse or of an 'impersonal', third-person narrative, can no longer be conceived of as an act of singular authority, but must be understood as a process of *collaboration* between an individual consciousness and that Other which permeates it (16, emphasis original)

The self is defined as self in relation to the other, while both self and other are necessarily multiple. In *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin addresses how we are conditioned not to recognize the relational dimension of self-hood by possessive individualism (63). The self's claim to referentiality rests in the recognition of the others which comprises the self. The story about oneself does not become ancillary to the stories of others, as the latter is an integral part of the story about the self. In autobiographical writings that revolve around the idea of relational lives/selves, identities are conceived as relational and the narratives defy the boundary we try to establish between genres. The autobiography of oneself often offers the biograph(ies) and the

autobiograph(ies) of the other(s) (58). In the context of this thesis, the fictions of oneself offer as well as consist of the fictions about other selves. The autobiographical selves are partially constructed by other selves, and the narratives' claim to referentiality comes from the authors' acknowledgements of the fictiveness and relationality of their selves.

Within the framework of conception of self in autobiographical criticism, the thesis is structured along the changes in such a conception, beginning from self as an autonomous being to the self as an inter-subjectivity. As the foregrounding of my discussion of multiple selves in autobiographical fictions, Chapter Two explores the danger inherent in the demand for unity of self in the autobiographical genre, and the use of fictions as possible expressions of autobiographical truth. Chapter Three is, firstly, an extended discussion on the contextualization of autobiography in individualism and the abuse of autobiography it renders, also from the perspective of the pressure exerted by the demand for unity. Secondly, it is an examination of the concept of self-invention in autobiography in its different facets: the use of fictions in autobiography as a means of achieving one's psychological unity, and the creation of fictive selves as a part of the autobiographical story. Chapter Four explores the inherent difficulties in the understanding and presenting the self due to the nature of self as essentially multiple and contradictory, and the creation of autobiographical self as an inter-subjectivity of all selves that comprise the self in the textual universe. The notion *je est un autre* is illumined in the use of fictions – in the form of 'mirror texts' – which are constructed by the author as the means of breaking down the boundary between self and other, past and present, individual and collective. Starting with the question of how the autobiographer

presents and creates his self in the text, the thesis explores the multiple selves in autobiographical fictions and arrives at the notion *je est un autre* as the answer.

Chapter Two

Counter-lives/Counter-selves

Earlier autobiographical criticism, as I discussed in Chapter One, is contextualized in the development of Western culture of individualism. Autobiographies are considered histories of personalities, albeit autonomous individuals. Consistency in the text – both historical and psychological – is a main concern for the critics since they consider a coherent life story to be the basis of subjective truth. The uniqueness of the individual is seen to be inter-twined with the uniqueness of his circumstance, as self comes into being through its interplay with the world. The synthesis between self and the world is, on the other hand, a part of the critics' conception of unity of self: the story of the autobiographer's life reveals his inner core, as it appears to the world through his self-representation.

As the foregrounding of my discussion on the notion of *je est un autre* and multiple selves, this chapter focuses on the problematic of reconstruction of life as a coherent whole, an autobiographical enterprise Philip Roth parodies in *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography.* The first of Roth's autobiographical tetralogy[i], the half autobiographical, half meta-fictional text offers a mock example and a critique of classic autobiography as history of personality, through which the autobiographer claims to present his inner core. The denial of distance between oneself and his self – writing self and written self, present self and past self – is inter-twined with the emphasis on the present standpoint of the autobiographer. Such a present standpoint is exposed as an accomplice to his arbitrary shaping of the past, which is grounded in the demand for unity of self. The demand for synthesis between self and the world is caricatured as self-

undermining, as contradictions surface in the text and illuminate how one's self-representation simply conforms to the stereotypes of one's time. The shattering of the autobiographer's present perspective points to the possibility of a counter-text to the written version, a scenario manifested in the paratext in *The Facts*. The dialogue between the narrator of the autobiography and his fictional alter-ego suggests an oppositional reading that is discouraged in a conventional autobiography. The interaction between the two selves points to the impossibility of presenting one's self – as an defined entity – in the text, since the self is necessarily multiple, and manifests itself in contradictory facets. The fictions of selves suggest another kind of unity in the autobiographical narrative: the idea of self as narrative convention, as the creation of alternate existences. In the absence of a singular autobiographical self, Philip Roth makes his presence felt through impersonations. The truth of the author is speculated and revealed through multiple selves in autobiographical fictions, an idea central to my thesis that I will elaborate in the next chapter.

Having entered the autobiographical pact proposed by Philippe Lejeune, the identical name of author, narrator and character[ii], *The Facts* qualifies as an autobiography and has been labeled as such since its publication in 1988. The autobiography is framed by a paratext – a letter from Roth to his self-proclaimed fictional alter-ego, Nathan Zuckerman, the protagonist of his novels *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue*[iii] and *The Counterlife*, and a reply from Zuckerman at the end of the book. Both Roth and Zuckerman are protagonists created by Philip Roth the author, and the former plays the role of autobiographer in the text. In his letter to Zuckerman, Roth lays out his

motivations behind the writing of autobiography: a crisis-induced desire for understanding his life and returning to the past where the deaths of his parents did not exist. The real motivation, however, is his longing to be reengaged with his real self, to recover from fiction fatigue after having fictionalized himself for too long in his novels. In affirming his faithfulness to the facts – how he presents himself 'undisguised' - Roth modifies it by stating how his narrative is 'a sequence of stories' constructed to 'bind up the facts with a persuasive *hypothesis* that unravels [his] history's meaning' (4, 8, emphasis original). The representation was partly shaped by his concerns of the privacy of his significant others, which he wanted to protect as much as possible. The referential value of the autobiography, however, is beyond question: Roth insists how, opposed to his novel, his autobiography is the first thing he has ever written 'unconsciously' and sounds more like the voice of the written self (5. 9). Not only the distance between past and present is bridged, but also the distance between oneself and one's self – between the recounting self and the recounted self. The denial of distance is grounded in the present situation of the autobiographer, whose purpose of writing is self-redemption.

The present standpoint of the autobiographer's, as I argued in the last chapter, is the precondition of unity of self in the text. Roth's self-parody in *The Facts* reads like a direct attack on many of the critics' arguments for both the present standpoint and the unity it renders. The relationship between part and whole – or in Pascal's formulation, the 'decisive element' of autobiography: 'the meaning an event acquires when viewed in the perspective of a whole life' – depends on the consistency of the personality portrait, a demand that is revealed as self-contradictory in *The Facts* (18). Divided into six parts, a prologue and five chapters, the autobiography traces Roth's growth as a young man and

an artist through stages of development of a personality, which ends the moment when the individual has seemingly solidified his identity. The weaving together of one's personality is never as seamless in real life, and *The Facts* gives a parody of an autobiographer whose efforts in maintaining the consistency of his personality portrait are often at odds with one another. The prologue establishes the 'credo of his childhood'—'the Jewish family was an inviolate haven against every form of menace' (Wirth-Nesher 261, Roth 14). Narrative is the main form Roth's father knowledge takes, who is the original mold for Roth's identity and whose repertoire is passed onto the latter: family, Newark, Jew (16). The next chapter, 'Safe at Home', underscores the centrality of his Jewish-American identity. The child perceived the world through the perspective of the Jewish community in Newark, a haven that was occasionally threatened by gentile hostility. Roth was the moderate child he was because of the non-combative nature of Jews, while his family life was a product of the time: his father's moderate success at an established insurance company was due to and despite of the anti-Semitism in the American society. For Roth and his fellow Jews, their Jewish identity was unquestionable, while their experience as Jews in America was the primary means by which they 'deepened' their '*Americanness*' (31, emphasis original). In the third chapter, 'Joe College', Roth's development as a young man takes on the prototype of autonomous individual, who is shaped by his circumstance but always triumphs over it. The young man broke away from a series of safe circle: home, Newark, Jewish fraternity, literary circle, exclusive relationship with a gentile young girl and finally, undergraduate studies in his early twenties. The young talent, like Benjamin Franklin, was the leader among his peers, criticized others' mischief, wrote several pieces of prose, satirized his rival

newspaper, was most well-read and competitive in his circle, dated a girl who was generally well-behaved, skipped town for other pursuits.

Throughout the narration Roth often reminds the readers of his keywords: 'Jews' and 'American', since he conceives himself as a writer whose innate taste for comic mockery is essentially Jewish, and as a man who is determined to be a self-reliant, American hero. His actions and reactions throughout the autobiography might be in accord with the inner core he presents of himself, yet it is precisely this consistency that arouses distrust in the readers. Zuckerman is correct as he points out Roth had worked out in his mind the formula of who he is, and the representation could be anybody (165). The representation comes across as elusive and self-contradictory at various points, when the autobiographer is close to the point of having to reveal the truth about his actions. In 'Girl of My Dreams', the readers are introduced to the character named Josie, who is 'a hard-up loser...a penniless secretary and divorced women of two small children' (105), the disastrous ex-wife who dominated Roth's imagination for over two decades and appears as different impersonations in several of Roth's novels. The initial encounter, as the autobiographer admits, was partly triggered by his drunkenness after a party. To maintain his self image as the Jewish young man who is self-sufficient, adventurous, and at the heart of heterogeneity of American culture, the trigger is modified by his recognition of her exoticness: Josie was the world's victim, 'a dispossessed refugee from a sociobiological background to which my own was deemed, by both old- and new-world racial mythology, to be subservient, if not inferior' (82). Roth puts it more clearly later in the autobiography, that he was an idealistic young man who saw Josie as a harder test in life because of her background. The rationale about people being naive: 'even the

brightest, and not just as youngsters either' seems reasonable enough, but it is a cover for his real motive as much as the equation of Josie with 'the world's victim' (90). In a description of the early stage of their affair, Roth mentions how his tales of safe Jewish haven could never have enticed the same fascination in other girls he had dated, who were raised by doting parents in more prosperous families. At this point one might expect Roth to tell his readers the real reason behind his affair with Josie, and the explanation turns out to be 'an innate taste for dramatic juxtaposition, an infatuation with the couple of seemingly alien perspectives' (93). Roth attempts to take cover in another confession of immaturity and naivety: 'I was...motivated by an egoistic young lover's predilection for intimacy and sincerity...telling her who I thought I was and what I believed had informed me', but stressing how he was also 'engaged by a compelling form of narrative responsory' (93).

In his critique Zuckerman traces the pattern of Roth's romantic life from another perspective: Roth was raised to be reliable in the Jewish community he grew up in and his reliability became the magnet to the broken, women who were either addicted, fatherless, or both (182). Having fit into the role of a 'crutch', Roth could not date any woman who was more independent, or could not keep those he dated who only needed him as a 'cock' (183). A more significant reason is hidden, however, since any rational man would have recognized Josie meant disaster. Zuckerman accuses Roth of idealizing the past because of 'a need for reconciliation with the tribe', including his dead mother and in view of the imminent death of his father (173). Zuckerman thus concludes that real reason is Roth's hatred the Jewish community he grew up in, which he refuses to touch on in the autobiography. The hatred is concealed in the mask of an irreducible Jewishness

Roth repeatedly claims for himself, an element of himself that is even intrinsic to his identity as an American. The hatred, being internalized, turned into self-hatred and the tendency to sabotage, and Josie, the gentle woman who promised destruction, was the logical choice for Roth as he asserted his manhood. This self-hatred is the cause of the charges of anti-Semitism against Roth in the chapter 'All in the Family', charges considered to be valid by Zuckerman, but declared by Roth to be the product of Jews' insecurity more than that of his satirical stories. There is no way one could find out whether this version is the truth, though it counter balances Roth's explanations for his actions and the arbitrary coherence of his Jewish-American identity. It is also illuminating over Roth's emphasis on his Jewishness and his taste for satire and comic mockery being an innate quality of Jews, since it would work as an implicit self-defense against the charges of anti-Semitism. Another contradiction it might explain is Roth's treatment of his family in his autobiography, who Roth declared to be central to his identity formation and yet has little presence in the text. Roth's mother, referred to as the 'Jewish Florence Nightingale' and the seal coat baby Philip clung onto in the prologue, plays no significant role in the bildungsroman of the protagonist and only appears as a productive, compromising housewife in the family who everyone loves. The fight between Roth and his father, which Roth described as the test of his independence, is only given one paragraph in 'Joe College'. None of the reasons for the fight is mentioned, and the emotions of the autobiographer are summarized in one line: 'a shell-shocked son, freshly evacuated from the Oedipal battlefield, in dire need of rest and rehabilitation' (47).

In the light of the critics' arguments for the situation of the autobiographer, the contradictions and evasions could be understood in the context of writing of autobiography as a form of self-therapy for the author. The idealizations of his relationship with his family, the Jewish community and Josie could be seen as a product of his desire for reconciliation with his origins for self-redemption. The recovery of his past self requires the invention of one, and the autobiographer settles on the Jewish-American as a comic writer and an autonomous individual at the same time. The laying out of one's motivations and inventions, in the scenario in *The Facts*, fails to neutralize criticism in advance and highlights the self-undermining facets of the present perspective of the autobiographer's. The arbitrariness of self-representation is rooted in the autobiographer's denial of distance between himself and his self – writing self and written self, past self and present self. Roth denies the split intentionality inherent in the autobiographical genre when he claims the autobiography is the first thing he has ever written 'unconsciously', and it is the voice of the written self being presented in the text. The scenario is dramatized as both the writing self and the written self in the autobiography are fictions of Philip Roth the author, who constructs his critique on this denial through fictions of selves. The notion that one could present one's past self in the writing is essentially at odds with the emphasis on the autobiographer: if the self-representation is governed by the present standpoint and the autobiographer re-enters his past through this perspective, how does one ever get in touch with this past self, or one's self at certain point in the past? Could one feel what one did, even if mental pictures of the past re-surfaces, if one insists on making sense of this picture with a present perspective in order to build a certain self-image? It is no less problematic to assume one

could present the self within oneself – an interiority – as it is in a written text as the autobiography in *The Facts*, if one has a definite version of self-portrait in mind: the interiority is necessary a fiction when it is presented in the written text. The parody of such an autobiographer, who denies the distance between his present self and his past self, conforms to Renza's formulation of 'the confessional mode' of autobiography: the autobiographer intuits how his writing is a sketchy, arbitrary rendering of his life, which leads to a fictive suspension of the writer's distance from his written 'I', creating the possibility of an alternative text to which the written version is but an oblique 'prelude' or indecisive 'failure' (281-91), an issue I will explore in greater details later in this chapter.

Roth's affirmation of his faithfulness to the non-fictional approach, his claim of appearing 'undisguised' in *The Facts* is a parody of Rousseau as much as any other autobiographer who gives away their insincerity instead of sincerity. The unity of life endorsed by the present standpoint becomes over-determined when the autobiographer is at pains to prove his history's consistency. One might recall Gusdorf's formulation of how man achieves his 'special unity and identity across time': 'to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and regroup them in a comprehensive sketch…[the autobiographer] strains towards a complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny' (Gusdorf 35). Gusdorf also claims autobiography to be 'one of the means to self-knowledge thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality', and it reveals '[my] individual unity, the mysterious essence of my being' (37). Gusdorf's brand of existentialism is described as 'goselised' by Robert Smith in *Derrida and Autobiography*, one that is 'more or less concerned with claiming autobiography as a

means of consumerist "self-realisation", to which a value of truth, as wholesome sincerity, is often superadded' (Smith 55). Despite the vaguely political tone of his language, Smith does point out how the autobiographical genre is laden with an insistence on the text as a means to unity of self, which in turn produces the need to defend the subjective truth being presented. As the need for consistency – or the paranoia over inconsistency – becomes overtly obvious, readers spots signs of the autobiographer's insecurity. In the parody in *The Facts*, one only sees the arbitrary coherence of the life story. Once the unity of self – between past and present, writing persona and the written self – is the most important criterion, the 'true' self of the autobiographer is nowhere to be seen.

The synthesis between self and the world, as I suggested in the introduction of this thesis, is a part of the critics' conception of the truth of self and its unity. In the words of Pascal's, the unity of life and self rests on the assumption that 'one could feel content if one could feel one's self to be consistent, to have developed naturally and organically, to have remained "true to itself"' (viii). The demand for consistency, however, is essentially contradictory to the conception of life or self as a process of unfolding – one must stop the process and choose an arbitrary standpoint for the personality portrait, whose consistency is supposed to symbolize the unity of self. The chosen version, conditioned by the present standpoint, is necessarily one-sided and contradicts the implication that one is constantly developing and changing, in the process of self unfolding. The paradox may suggest that such unity is a necessary illusion, though it is an unobtainable ideal as much as a synthesis between self and the world in Pascal's

formulations. While Weintraub conceives the ideal relationship between individual and the world along the line of self versus personality ideals – the two being mutually inter-active and formative – it is equally difficult to see how one could achieve this balance in an autobiographical narrative, especially as it is considered to be reached in Goethe's autobiography and became impossible ever since. The self-parody in *The Facts* undermines the ideal relationship between individual and personality models Weintraub proposes, as the demand for consistency pressures the autobiographer into conforming to types in his representation of himself and others. The portraits of Roth and his others in *The Facts*, as they are expected to be distinctive individuals and representatives of the time they lived in, are devoid of individualities. The consistency of these types and models becomes camouflage for the truth the autobiographer refuses to disclose, in the same way as his hiding behind the consistency of his identity in the text. The idea of self coming into being through its interplay with the world again becomes camouflage for motives one attempts to hide, as what happens in the world is used to explain what happens within the individual.

In the same vein as his rationalization of the liaison with Josie, Roth opens the last chapter of *The Facts*, 'Now Vee May Perhaps to Begin', with a description of his next significant partner, May. May was a gentile woman 'at the other end of the American spectrum of Josie' and in each, 'inborn character proclivities appeared to have been carried to a stereotypical extreme by something innately disabling in their social origins' (132). Roth was drawn to them because 'they were intriguingly estranged from the very strata of American society of which they were each distinctively emblazoned offspring (132-3). It echoes Roth's account of his temperament, as a writer who favors dramatic

juxtapositions and coupling of opposite perspectives. The turbulence of the sixties in America paints the background of the development of Roth's relationship with May and Roth's maturity as a writer. The opposition against the Vietnam War 'activated the fantastical style of obscene satire that began to challenge virtually every hallowed rule of social propriety' in the sixties, which Roth would develop in his novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, a book whose subject matter Roth deems distinctively his (137). May changed from an utterly placid woman into an anti-war activist, and her nudity developed 'a power and effective of its own' (140). Their different generic markings gave their relationship 'a pervasive anthropological dimension' that 'delineated just the sort of tribal difference that would empower Portnoy's manic self-presentation' (137). The relationship between self and the world is markedly interactive, but the autobiographer seems far off from being an independent-minded individual, if his attraction to her was triggered and altered by her social and generic origins. The truth about their relationship is concealed in the same manner at the end of the autobiography, a concealment that appears strained and pushes the autobiographer to arrive at an abrupt ending. At the moments of success Roth wondered why he was 'trying vainly to have a good time' while 'the turbulence of the American sixties', which had enlivened his fiction and his life, 'looked finally to be boiling over' (158). This restlessness led to his weariness of 'the loving loyalty of May Aldridge' and his determination to be 'an absolutely independent, self-sufficient man', to be the adventurous, buoyant young man who once handily picked up a divorcee 'who'd looked nothing so much as the All-American girl, albeit one enticingly at odds with her origins' (160) at the end of the autobiography.

One is hard pressed to understand how this five-year relationship, previously the means to regeneration, became mere nuisance to Roth because of hints of changes in the American society; or how his agitation prompted him to return to a self he had struggled so hard to shake off throughout the years. Although the autobiography has shown Roth's history in stages, each seemingly developing from the previous one, as a reader I do not see how the autobiographer has developed if he returns to the previous self that has been proven destructive. The only consistency that is grounded in the text is, in fact, that of the autobiographer's efforts in shaping his self-image according to the formula of personality he has devised for himself: a Jewish writer who has a taste for dramatic juxtapositions, who is also self-reliant, American hero who lives at the heart of the culture's heterogeneity. The unity of self in the text proves self-undermining: its presence shows the readers how it is a construct that can become over-determined as the autobiographer resorts to self-deception, and in turns attempts to deceive his readers. According to the critics' notion of subjective truth – the truth of man, the truth of self – such deliberate deception might be considered the truth about the autobiographer in relation to his present identity. One could only accept this notion as an explanation for Roth's self-representation, if one considers the essence of his self to be deceit – the urge in deceiving readers and most importantly, himself. An alternative possibility would be the autobiographer has no individuality and his self is so shallow that he could not see it himself, that he could only resort to stereotypes for 'self-representation'. At any rate, one could hardly argue for the autobiographer being genuine or the autobiography being a genuine expression of the self of the autobiographer, and the possibility of self-defense for Roth is eliminated in the paratext.

The paratext in *The Facts* would be the alternative text to the written version, in Renza's conception, though in *The Facts* this alternative text is not privileged as the official version of truth, but has the same status as the written text in the autobiography, both of them being counter-texts to each other. The counter-text is an extended discussion of the nature of self-invention in writing, and an argument for realization of self through the creation of alternative existences. The idea of counter-texts is central to *The Facts*, since the truth of the author is speculated in the interaction of the autobiographer's text and his alter-ego's reading, each being possible version of truth. The interplay of these counter-texts is a continuation of themes of Roth's previous novel, *The Counterlife*, an imitation of and mediation on autobiography, of the self writing about itself as creation of alternate existences in writing (Shostak 207). The process is summarized in the following lines by Zuckerman from the novel, which make the epigraph to *The Facts*: 'And as he spoke I was thinking, *the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn into*' (*The Counterlife* 111, emphasis original). *The Facts* ends with Zuckerman's reply, and readers are tempted to believe Zuckerman's speculations as the truth in the autobiography, as if the counter-self is disclosing the autobiographer's secrets. Zuckerman's discussion of *The Facts* provides the oppositional reading that is unavailable in a conventional autobiographical text, and this paratext challenges the validity of Roth's self-proclaimed, 'faithful' accounts of the facts. Zuckerman details the presuppositions he has of autobiography – how an autobiographer cannot tell anything discreet, and is judged morally and ethnically, by the proximity of his narration to the truth – and concludes Roth is 'far better off' writing about Zuckerman than 'accurately'

reporting his own life (161). He supports his argument by outlining the pattern of life story in the autobiography, to show how Roth has deliberately shaped his written self along the line of his Jewish-American identity, the 'terrific upheaval of the involvement with Josie', and his response to the larger world, culminating in the turbulence of the sixties in New York, particularly the outcry against the Vietnam War (164-5). In response to the apparent contradictions and gaps between these stages of Roth's history, Zuckerman perceives the real shaping force in Roth's life to be self-destruction, a psychological mechanism that is given no weight in the autobiography. The tendency to sabotage, as aforementioned, is a product of Roth's hatred for the Jewish community he grew up in, which Roth does not talk about in his life story.

Convincing as it sounds, Zuckerman's reading is not any more valid than Roth's autobiographical expression, since it is governed by the same demand for unity of self and consistency in the personality portrait. Zuckerman does not allow for discontinuities of self in the autobiography any more than Roth, who might even claim greater authority over his self-representation. Zuckerman's critique undercuts its own basis, since it imposes another pattern on Roth's history that is shaped by an equally arbitrary standpoint, conditioned by pre-conceived ideas about who Roth is and is not. He is convinced there is something about his childhood Roth has hidden from his readers, since he does not believe the 'warm, comforting home' portrayed in *The Facts* to be the home that nurtured the author of *Portnoy's Complaint*, a novel misread by many Jews to be a thinly disguised, obscene autobiography (165). The drama, tension and powerful narration in Roth's novels are taken to be real expressions of the author's self. Zuckerman succumbs to the temptation of confusing novelistic contrivance with

autobiographical facts of an author, which makes Zuckerman's reading a misreading. It is doubly ironic since Zuckerman is a Jewish writers who suffers a similar but more drastic fate, notably his being denounced by his father in the latter's deathbed. Zuckerman may very well have projected himself onto Roth the way he claims Roth has projected himself onto Zuckerman, and his reading is a coded self-representation. He is also undermining his existence as an autonomous character in his fictional universe, as he asserts he is the self in which Roth impersonates best. Zuckerman's assertion might have, however, come from a need for safeguarding his existence in fictions. He admits to being envious and furious as he realizes the family feud he suffers has never happened to Roth, that it 'stemmed solely from the requirements of a novel' that is not even his own (163). As he decides the loving family Roth comes from 'does not produces artists as much as it produces dentists and accountants', Zuckerman immediately defends himself against any possible charges of 'the disowned son embittered permanently by his deprivation' (162). Despite his disclaimer, one could see how Zuckerman is trying to consolidate his self – and possibly his coded self-representation - by equating misery with artistic inspirations. Zuckerman also tries, in another attempt to justify his identity, to convince Roth not to '*de*-imagine' his life or portray himself as the ' "good" boy' since it would give his Jewish seniors the satisfaction they have wanted for three decades, and Roth's success as a fiction writer lies in his 'having tricked' his readers into misunderstanding him (166-7, emphasis original). Zuckerman concludes one could not admit into autobiography 'the inadmissable' and says to Roth: 'Your medium for the really merciless self-evisceration, your medium for genuine self-confrontation, is me' (185).

If readers could not trust Roth's life story in *The Facts*, neither could they consider Zuckerman's version as any more valid since it is necessitated by his anxiety over his existence. His elaborated persuasion is grounded in the awareness of his existence being a product of Roth's creation. He is also engaged in the autobiographical enterprise of self-redemption, arguing against the possible demise of his self in Roth's works[iv]. Roth's return to fiction towards the end of *The Facts* seems to authorize Zuckerman's reading over Roth's self-representation, as Zuckerman again becomes Roth's front man in the paratext. One could argue for the opposite interpretation, however, as Roth may have recovered from his fiction fatigue through the writing of autobiography[v]. Both of them, despite their status as possible versions of truth, are constructs that highlight the theme of self as creation of alternate existences. Zuckerman is the tool for such creation years before the publication of the Zuckerman novels, when he made his first appearance in Roth's 1974 novel *My Life as a Man*. *My Life as a Man* is an ostensible collection of autobiographical writings by Peter Tarnopol which begins with the stories 'Salad Days' and 'Courting Disaster'. Tarnopol admittedly impersonates himself in Nathan Zuckerman as he recounts his growing up in Jewish neighborhood and his disastrous marriage, but his failure in exorcising the past leads to the writing of 'My True Story'. At the beginning of the narrative is a foreword written by Tarnopol himself:

> 'Presently Mr. Tarnopol is preparing to forsake the art of fiction for a while embark upon an autobiographical narrative, an endeavor which he approaches warily, uncertain as to both its advisability and usefulness. Not only would the publication of such a personal document raise serious and legal problems, but there is no reason to believe that by keeping his imagination at bay and rigorously

> adhering to the facts, Mr. Tarnopol will have his obsession [with ex-wife Maureen] once and for all. It remains to be seen whether his candor, such as it is, can serve any better than his art...to demystify the past and mitigate his admittedly uncommendable sense of defeat (*My Life as a Man* 110-1)

Given the striking parallels between the authorial statements and some of the content between two books, notably the romantic affairs and martial ordeal, readers are tempted to fill in the gaps in the psychological unity in *The Facts* with details from the novel. Roth seems to invite such reading as he admits the novel was written as an attempt to exorcise his hatred of his ex-wife, though the difficulty of writing it proved the book to be her revenge on him instead of his on her (*The Facts* 152). In his article "'Why Not Tell the Truth?': the Autobiographies of Three Fiction Writers', Peter J. Bailey concludes Philip Roth opts for an identical cure in his autobiography as the one in his novel, a relief from the sense of defeat (Bailey 220). I am unconvinced by his reading, and rather consider the most important parallel to be the presence of Zuckerman as the self-proclaimed alter-ego of both Roth's and Tarnopol's. Both works are parodies of an autobiographer who impersonates and wrestles with his shadow, though *The Facts* is explicitly contextualized in Philip Roth's life and *My Life as a Man* is not. True to the Roth's fictional oeuvre, *The Facts* is another example of the foreground of self as narrative invention, and another installment of the alternate selves and lives from *The Counterlife*. In the last chapter of the novel, Maria, the English wife of Zuckerman's, leaves Zuckerman and the book after a misunderstanding over anti-Semitism gets blown out of proportion. The conflict is resolved in *The Facts*, though quickly resumed as the couple discusses Roth's autobiography. Maria's reading focuses on the 'Jewish stuff' and

rationalization in the narrative, which makes the counter-text to the autobiography as well as to Zuckerman's reading (*The Facts* 188). Zuckerman is again exposed to be the novelist who dramatizes and rationalizes, as he tries to convince Maria how the Zuckerman's fictions are more truthful expressions of Roth: only behind the mask of their fictions can Roth be truly free, which makes them – the two fictional characters – more 'interesting' (*The Facts* 192). Zuckerman is the counter-self to Roth as much as Maria is to Zuckerman, since she is Zuckerman's creation from *The Counterlife*. In this series of speculative narratives, all selves are narrative invention. In his farewell letter to Maria, Zuckerman gives a deconstructive critique of the Western conception of the essential self:

> Being Zuckerman is one long performance and the very opposite of what is thought of as *being oneself*. In fact, those who most seem to be themselves appear to me people impersonating what they think they might like to be…
>
> …what I am describing, people divided in themselves, is said to characterize mental illness…The whole Western idea of mental health runs in precisely the opposite direction: what is desirable is congruity between your self-consciousness and your natural being. But there are those whose sanity flows from the conscious *separation* of those two things. If there even is a natural being, an irreducible self, it is rather small, I think, and may even be the root of all impersonation—the natural being may be the skill itself, the innate capacity to impersonate.

> There is no you, Maria, any more than there's a me...in the absence of a self, one impersonates selves, and after a while impersonates best the self that best gets one through... (*The Counterlife* 319-30, emphasis original)

The creation of counter-texts and alternate existences is to dramatize the fact that 'life does not necessarily have a course, a simple sequence, a predictable pattern' ('An Interview with Philip Roth' 12). The coherent shaping of a life in any autobiographical text is illusory, and the only unity in *The Facts* is the idea of counter-lives, the re-creation of one's life in alternative narratives.

The Facts is an anti-autobiography in the sense that it challenges and destabilizes several pre-suppositions of the genre with a mock autobiography of the author, who does not actually claim the text as a true document of his life or a representation of his self. The self of Philip Roth, if it exists as an intrinsic entity within the writer, is realized through the novelist's urge of multiplying his self in his impersonations. If each of these fictive selves offer us glimpses into the self of Philip Roth, such self is split, multiple and contradictory. The truth of the autobiographical self remains uncertain, as Roth denies the possibility of any ultimate version of self in any of his works. The only certainty about the truth of Philip Roth is his novelist's urge of creating alternative existences, which provides the ground for the unity of his various selves in his fictions. The unity is, however, uncertain as Philip Roth forever hides behind the mask of the writer.

The demand for unity, as a part of the contextualization of autobiography in individualism, is potentially stifling for the autobiographer whose purpose in writing is to present one's self. The fictions of selves, as I have shown in this chapter, are effectively

used by Philip Roth to explore the pressure an autobiographer is under and the deceit one could potentially commit as a part of one's self-assertion. The relationship between self and the world weighs in the favor of the former, as the self attempts to disguise the contradictions within itself in the autobiographical narrative. The same ego-centricism is the target of parody and satire in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, in which Milan Kundera constructs the fictions of selves as cultural criticism on the abuse of the autobiographical genre in the contemporary society. The notion of subjective truth is exploited as an obsessive emphasis on one's interiority, a complete collapse of distance between oneself and his/her self. The demand for unity again leads to the concealment instead of revelation – or even the demise – of the self. The intersection between the author's self and his others' underscores the nature of self as multiple, since all selves are partially constructed by others. The unity of self is replaced by the unity of the author and the fictive selves he created, in a textual universe where the infinitude of the self could be truly preserved.

Chapter Three

Fictions of Selves/Selves as Fictions

In his direct statements about the form and content of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera writes:

> This book is a novel in the form of variations. The various parts follow each other like the various stages of a voyage leading into the interior of a theme, the interior of a thought, the interior of a single, unique situation, the understanding of which recedes from my sight into the distance.
>
> It is a novel about Tamina, and whenever Tamina goes offstage, it is a novel for Tamina. She is its principal character and its principal audience, and all the other stories are variations on her own story and meet with her life as in a mirror.
>
> It is a novel about laughter and about forgetting, about forgetting and about Prague, about Prague and about the angels (Kundera 227)

One possible reading of the novel rendered by Kundera's statements is the novel as a series of variations on the theme of autobiography (Richards 221). The fiction of Tamina and its variations revolve around the theme of forgetting, which embodies the characters' attempts in maintaining his/her subjective reality or preserving his/her interiority. The privileging of subjective truth, as I argued in Chapter One, is essentially a modified view of earlier critics' notion of truth of man and is partly a defense for unity of self. It is also a part of the contextualization of autobiography in individualism, as truth is deemed an intrinsic value of individual expression. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Kundera parodies the abuse of autobiographical genre as a result of an overt

emphasis on the value of interiority and individual expression. The interiority of the individual undermines rather than consolidates itself in the text, when the distance between oneself and one's self is eliminated. Subjective truth becomes the pretext under which one writes and rewrites the fictions of one's life, as parts of the past are obliterated in the name of upholding one's present identity. The demand for unity is not limited to unity of self across time, but includes unity of oneself with his/her self and unity of others with oneself in a totally ego-centric universe. With the alternation of genres – fiction, essay, historical facts, elements of fantasy, autobiographical anecdotes – Kundera illustrates how the same desire for self-glorification governs autobiographical acts in different situations, and how the demand for unity contributes to the demise of self instead of its preservation. The autobiographical strategy of Kundera poses a marked contrast to the single-voiced narration he parodies: in the autobiographical universe of Kundera, the boundary between self and others is invalidated as all selves – autobiographical, fictional, historical, fantastical – are constituents of the same universe. The autobiographical self is split and multiple, as details of Kundera's life become elements of the stories of other selves. The invention of autobiographical self is seen in a new light: fictions of selves bring not the unity of self of the autobiographer, but unity between the characters and their creators. The concept of fictions of selves has its ground in the mission of the novel: to keep man's 'world of life' under a permanent light, and to protect human from 'the forgetting of being' (The Art of the Novel 17).

An assumption of the contextualization of autobiography in individualism, in Weintraub's formulations, is that the genre embraces man's 'successive actualizations' of

his potential and the 'intrinsic justification' in each style of life (xii). As I pointed out in Chapter One, the 'danger point of morbid self-inspection and egocentricism' Weintraub warns against is near at hand for any autobiographer, since one could easily indulge in one's uniqueness and fail to see the others and the world in the same light. In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch distinguishes a necessary focus on self from morbid obsession with the self in contemporary autobiographical writings:

> The popularity of the confessional mode testifies…to the new narcissism that runs all through American culture; but the best work in this vein attempts, precisely through disclosure, to achieve a critical distance from the self and to gain insight into the historical forces reproduced in psychological form, that have made the very concept of selfhood increasingly problematic…Yet the increasing interpenetration of fiction, journalism, and autobiography undeniably indicates that many writers find it more and more difficult to achieve the detachment indispensable to art. Instead of fictionalizing personal material or otherwise reordering it, they have taken to presenting it undigested…Instead of working through working through their memories, many writers now rely on mere self-disclosure to keep the reader interested, appealing not to his understanding but to his salacious curiosity about the private lives…Even the best confessional writers walk a fine line between self-analysis and self-indulgence. Their books…waver between hard-won personal revelation, chastened by the anguish with which it was gained, and the kind of spurious confession whose only claim to the reader's attention is that it describes events of immediate interest to the author…it allows a

lazy writer to indulge in 'the kind of immodest self-revelation which ultimately hides more than it admits (16-9)

The difference between true autobiographers and their 'spurious' imitations is parodized in 'Lost Letter', the forth part of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. The part opens with Kundera creating his heroine Tamina, the 'experimental self' through which he constructs his critique of the autobiographical culture he terms graphomania (*The Art of Novel* 34). Fictions and essays illuminate each other throughout Part Four, with the author commenting on the abuse of the autobiographical genre from different perspectives. A Czech widow who serves coffee in a small café in Paris, Tamina is popular among all her customers since they all talk to her about themselves and she never offers any resistance. Tamina lives in a world in which everyone wants to outtalk one another, which Kundera describes as 'a battle to seize the ear of others' (110). The scenario is exemplified in section eight, in which the fictional characters Bibi and Banaka talk about capturing their perception of the world in writing and pretend to echo each other's thoughts. Banaka announces their life in the world no longer matters because '[it] has been interiorized', and the uniqueness of their inner world would suffice (125). Bibi describes her need to write as a direct outcome of her self-awareness, about how her 'whole body is filled with the desire to express itself' and she knows her feelings to be absolutely unique and original (125). The theme of graphomania is elaborated in the next section when Kundera recounts his meeting with a taxi driver, who swam three days and three nights for survival during the war, and writes about his experience during his chronic insomnia because he believes 'it could help a lot of people' (126). The real reason for writing, as Kundera points out, is one's self-defense against the lack of

attention from one's loved ones. The autobiographical mode shifts to the essayist as Kundera defines graphomania as 'a desire to write books (to have a public of unknown readers)', and points out '[the] mainspring that drives one to write is necessarily an absence of vital content, that void within the individual in the age of isolation' (127). The proliferation of graphomania is unstoppable, since 'everyone is pained by the thought of disappearing, unheard and unseen, into an indifferent universe'; and when everyone turns himself 'into a universe of words', 'the age of universal deafness and incomprehension will have arrived' (147).

Graphomania may be a contemporary phenomenon according to Kundera's definitions, but one could see its roots in the notion of autobiography as manifestation of individuality. The caricatures of Bibi and Banaka remind one of how self-awareness is often seen as synonymous with self-assertion in earlier autobiographical criticism, which entails an assertion of centrality of self by viewing the world as an 'emanation' from the self (Marcus 151). Bibi's proclamation of her need for self-expression suggests the desire for unity of oneself with his/her self, and such desires could eliminate the distance one must take from oneself in an autobiographical enterprise and reduce autobiography into a bitter monologue. The privileging of interiority, originally a defense for subjective truth in the autobiographical genre, takes on the form of narcissism and contributes to the 'spurious' imitations of autobiography Lasch criticizes. The proliferation of such autobiographical writings is parodied in the episode of Bibi and her friends watching television at her place in section thirteen, with Tamina as an observer and ridiculer of the graphomaniacs. In a TV program where a popular journalist converses with the authors of the books published the week before, one of the authors describes the 'shocking erotic

confessions' in his memoirs as 'very exact arithmetic': 'a total of six hours and fifty-six minutes of orgasm' in his life (135). The objectification of intimate details of one's life is joined by the audience: as the author talks about his first orgasm in Rourou, Joujou talks about her own orgasm and soon Bibi and DeDe Joujou are discussing the orgasm of someone called Tanaka. None of them listens to anyone else and insists on talking aggressively, as if others are non-existent. One does not strengthen one's uniqueness of one's self as much as reduce it by exposing one's private experiences, since it is precisely this privateness that distinguishes one's experience from someone else's. As Pascal Bruckner puts it in his discussion of proliferation of autobiographical writings in France since the 1970's, the subjectivity in these writings in unparalleled that they all end up resembling each other, as if written by the same person. The publication of such writings becomes an isolating activity, which contradicts its intended universality. As each text is a fanatical celebration of the writer's uniqueness or his interiority, it repels his readers and contributes to the further isolation of each individual (31).

Kundera's fictions could be read as cultural criticism on the mobilization of graphomania aided by mass media: as literature falls more and more into the hands of mass media, the audience witnesses the same simplifications and stereotypes day after day. One sees similar scenarios throughout the novels, in which the forgetting of being is seen to be rooted in one's desire for unity of oneself with his/her self and for distinguishing one's individuality. In an ironic passage in Part Three, 'The Angels', Kundera pinpoints how one falls prey into the manipulation of media and political party as they exploit 'the expression of being rejoicing in being':

> You certainly remember this scene from dozens of bad films: a boy and a girl are running hand in hand in a beautiful spring (or summer) landscape...By laughing the two runners are proclaiming to the whole world... "We're happy, we're glad to be in the world, we're in agreement with being!" It's a silly scene...but it expresses a basic human attitude...
>
> All churches, all underwear manufacturers, all generals, all political parties, are in agreement about that kind of laughter, and all of them rush to put the image of the two laughter runners on the billboards advertising their religion, their products, their ideology, their nation, their sex, their dishwashing powder (81).

The passage is echoed in Part Six, also titled 'The Angels', where Kundera discusses how Czech people became victims to organized forgetting by the Communist Party. In the age of amnesia, the world is dominated by stereotyped harmonies, banal melodies and monotonous rhythms, but they appeal to the mass since everyone can 'fraternize by means of these simple combinations of tones', and there is 'no more boisterous, no more unanimous agreement with that than the agreement with being' (248). As graphomaniacs contribute to the forgetting of their beings by the autobiographical writings, human beings in general contribute to the same forgetting as they succumb to the desire for self-assertion. The obliteration of individuality by mass media is again parodized in the fictions in Part Seven, 'The Border'. The Clevis family represents individuals who modify their views on current debates according to ideas that are deemed 'progressive' (273). In an essayist passage within the fictions, Kundera writes:

> The best progressive ideas are those that include a strong enough dose of provocation to make its supporters feel proud of being original, but at the same time attract so many adherents that the risk of being an isolated exception is immediately averted by the noisy approval of a triumphant crowd...and the satisfaction of seeing their thoroughly nonconformist position suddenly become everyone's position (273-4).

The autobiographies of individuals like Clevis, from this perspective, are written by the on-going trends of contemporary society and all resemble one another in a similar manner as the graphomaniacs' writings. The demand for unity of oneself with his/her self, in this context, leads to the kind of empty self-assertion that contains no value as individual expression.

The difficulties in preserving one's interiority in such a contemporary society are explored through Kundera's invention of Tamina, the character who is constantly surrounded and gradually overwhelmed by graphomaniacs in Part Four. Tamina's present, as an exile and a widow, consists of serving coffee, offering her ears to graphomaniacs and holding onto the memories of her past. In her waking hours Tamina is a victim to graphomaniacs like Bibi and her friends, in her sleep she dreams of the ostriches she saw at a zoo earlier. In her dream Tamina is desperate to protect the golden ring in her mouth, which Kundera explains is a symbol of silence and beauty he draws from a story by Thomas Mann. In a half fictional, half essayist section, Kundera states how Tamina's dream is a parable of the graphomania she suffers in her life:

> Tamina will never know what those great birds came to tell her. But I know...They are not interested at all in her. Each of them came to tell her about

> itself...That it had spent its important childhood in the important village of Rourou. That its important orgasm had lasted six hours...That it had gone swimming, that it had fallen ill and then recovered...there is nothing more than what they want to tell her (145).

Throughout Part Four, Tamina is described to have resorted to live in and for silence, and in the memories of her husband. The task of preserving one's inner reality seems to have become impossible as graphomania invades one's subconscious, and Tamina's hope of recovery of her notebooks is devastated. Hugo, who offers to retrieve Tamina's notebooks from Prague, succeeds in having sex with Tamina but realizes she has been with him only because she wants him to go to Prague:

> Hugo is aware that the only deep feeling he is capable of is fidelity to the unrecognized, abandoned tower (the tower of the published article and the projected book about his love for Tamina), that he is capable of going to war for the tower and forcing Tamina to open his eyes and marvel at its height...He would agree to go to and from Prague a hundred times if only she would open her eyes a bit to the universe he wanted to take her to, the universe of his blood and thoughts! (158)

The story of Tamina in Part Four ends in the image of her being silently defeated, and disgusted by all others. One might recall Bruckner's criticism on the writings by such graphomanaics, and how they narrow instead of broadens experience. The self of Hugo, as well as other fictive selves in 'Lost Letters', exemplifies the abuse of the autobiographical genre as one borders on the morbid point of ego-centricism aforementioned in this chapter. The notion of autobiography as an 'active contribution' to

the world, in Pascal's conception, has been totally reversed: in the age of graphomania, exhibitions of petty egoisms contributes to acceleration of cultural amnesia and the loss of individuality.

The obliteration of individuals, apart from being a cultural phenomenon, has its manifestations in different variations and genres in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. The desire for self-glorification is psychological mechanism in all humans, and is at work whenever one writes and rewrites one's history, as illustrated in the intersections of history of Czechoslovakia and the story of Mirek in Part One, also titled 'Lost Letters'. The Communist Party rewrote the nation's autobiography when they removed Clementis from the picture of their coming into power in 1948. Four years later Clementis was charged with treason and hanged, and only his fur hat remains on Gottwald's hat in the photo of the historical event. Mirek, who imagines himself as the true historian of the nation by keeping political documents, desperately wants to retrieve the letters he wrote to the ugly mistress he once had before his arrest by the police. In Kundera's narration, Mirek's attempt is driven by '[the] desire to extend his arm far back to the past and hit it with his fist. The desire to slash the painting portraying his youth' (28). The alternation between historical facts, fictions, and authorial comments illustrates how the revision of the past is universal, as Kundera puts it in a half fictional, half essayist passage: 'Mirek rewrote history just like the Communist Party, like all political parties, like all peoples, like mankind' (33). Mirek cuts a particularly ironic figure in his struggle against being obliterated from the Communist idyll, as he spends his last moments of freedom trying to obliterate Zdena out of his idyll, to make it 'perfect and beautiful' (13). The

autobiographical act of Mirek may seem to take place in a different situation in life from those of the graphomaniacs, though all of them show the same tendency in turning autobiography into a monologic universe, in which both the relationships between oneself and one's self, between self and the world collapse. The graphomanaics are surrounded by their own words as by 'a wall of mirrors, which allows no voice to filter outside' (128). Mirek considers the world's space as 'merely an obstacle slowing down his activity' and fantasizes a glorious end in the prison that is 'entirely surrounded by walls', 'a splendidly illuminated scene of history' against which he paints his image as the heroic outcast (31, 33).

This solipsistic tendency is a product of the privileging of subjective reality, and Mirek is an autobiographer who constantly revises the fictions of his self according to his present needs. The truth of the autobiographer at the present moment has been an important defense for the unity of self, as well as the referential or truth value of autobiography as a genre. The story of Mirek, however, makes it difficult to defend the fictions of self in this context. Throughout his youth, Mirek told different stories about himself and lied about his liaison with Zdena in all kinds of occasions later on. Unwanted memories – those who reminded of his weakness as a young man – are totally forgotten, and gave way to self-satisfaction and self-praise. Earlier identities – the weak young man who did love an ugly girl, the idealistic 'comrade' who put blisters on his buttocks and uttered extreme opinions at meetings – are to be crossed out in order to maintain Mirek's present identity as the outcast of the Communist idyll till the end. Mirek imagines his life story coming to a glorious end when he will end up in prison:

> Mirek could not imagine a better ending for the novel of his life. They wanted to efface hundreds of thousands of lives from memory and leave nothing but an unstained idyll. But Mirek is going to land his whole body on that idyll, like a stain. He'll stay there just as Clementis's hat stayed on Gottwald's head (33).

One may recall Gusdorf's conception of autobiography as the means to self-redemption and revenge on history, and the unity of his identity across time may be important for Mirek when there is no more chance to change his life. The use of fictions in autobiographical enterprise, in Mirek's case, does not show the autobiographer 'according to our best lights' so much as expose his hypocrisy (Fyre 151). The revision of his imaginary life narrative shows the same disregard for others' individuality as the Communist Party's revision of the nation's history, as Mirek proclaims to be defending his individuality against the Communist idyll. The truth of Mirek's self – at any moment in history, as Kundera shows in the fictions in 'Lost Letters' – are only 'legends and lies' (24). Each of the successive selves Mirek invents in his life – the lover who feigned passion over his partner's body, or the climber who did not care how ugly a powerful woman was – are only evasions of truth. As I argued in my discussion of the fictions of self/self as fiction in Chapter One, autobiography as existential fiction may offer the site of negotiation for the autobiographer's psychological reality, but such notion could be easily exploited. The fictions Mirek constructs of himself, contrary to what Eakin's conception of the use of fictions in autobiography, cannot be understood as the truth of his self unless one sees his self as a lie. The negotiation we witness is one of self-deception, and the conflicting only come together at the end of the story, if one accept his

final self-image as the final installment of his deceit, of concealment of his lies. The unity of self is indeed a fulfillment of one's wish to abridge the gap between past and present, though it pinpoints discontinuities more than establish continuity between these selves for the readers of the novel. The demand for unity also proves to be destructive for the autobiographer, since Mirek's story comes to an end as he tries cross out his earlier identities to maintain his present one.

In *Understanding Milan Kundera: Public Events, Private Affairs,* Fred Misurella raises the questions of self in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: What is the self? What importance can it have, being so fragile as to be erased not only from physical life but memory as well? (23). Kundera has pointed out that to understand the self in his novels is to 'grasp the essence of its existential problem…Getting to the bottom of the situations, the motifs, even the words that shape him' (Salmon 'Conversation with Milan Kundera and on the Art of the Novel 73-75). The keywords for Kundera's self in the novel, as its title suggests, are laughter and forgetting. The fictions of the author, devoted to the two themes, provide the two structural climaxes in the novel where all genres come to a polyphony in the autobiographical. Kundera thus grasps his self in the autobiographical narratives in a similar manner as he grasps the selves of his characters. Kundera himself was one of selves who struggle against the forces of forgetting and the demand for unity, as one learns from his autobiography in Part Three, 'The Angels'. The rapid alternation of genres in Part Three illustrates the theme of laughter and the image of the ring dance, and highlights the author's personal experience as the basis of his fictions in the novel. The fictional illuminates the autobiographical, while the autobiographical

reaffirms his critique and contemplation throughout the novel. The opening sections of Part Three are the author's discussion on laughter with the use of fictions and essay. In the first section, the fictional characters Michelle are Gabrielle are attempting an interpretation of *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco, a play that allegorizes the collective fanaticism in humans that totalitarian control mobilizes and contain many parallel images to the images in Part Three[vi]. Kundera quotes Annie Leclerc's exaggerated claims about laughter being the 'utmost height of sensual pleasure…the expression of being rejoicing in being' (81). In his ironic essay in section four, Kundera defines demonic laughter against angelic laughter: the former denotes the absurdity of things, while the latter rejoices over the ordered and meaningful world of God's creation. Kundera's autobiography is narrated in section three, as he recounted his writing an astrology column for a weekly magazine which under an assumed name through the help of his young friend R. The autobiography is interrupted in section five, in which Kundera refers to a magazine photo showing a group of young people in a ring dance before their clash with the police, and offers his personal interpretation of the photo: 'I think I understand them: they have the impression that the circle they are describing on the ground is a magical circle uniting them like a ring. And their chests swell with an intense feeling of innocence: they are united…by dancing, like children (88). Madam Raphael, the teacher of Michelle and Gabrielle, 'clipped that photo from the magazine and gazed at it dreamily', for she has always wished to dance in a ring herself. Michelle and Gabrielle, united in their pride in their interpretation of *Rhinoceros*, emit the sounds that resemble the angel's laughter, while quotations from Annie Leclerc's essay are repeated.

The meaning of the variations is illuminated as they come to a polyphony Kundera returns to his autobiography in section six, as the young Kundera is described to have once shared the same desire for unity and self-glorification:

> I too once danced in a ring. It was in 1948...I took other Communist students by the hands or shoulders and we took two steps in place, one step forward, raised the left leg to one side and then the right to the other...we always had something to celebrate...and on our face we had the smile of happiness. Then one day I said something I should not have said, was expelled from the party, and had to leave the ring dance.
>
> This is when I understood the magical meaning of the circle...Like a meteorite broken off from a planet, I left the circle and have not yet stopped falling. Some people are granted their death as they are whirling around, and others are smashed at the end of their fall. And these others (I am one of them) always retain a kind of faint yearning for that lost ring dance, because we are all inhabitants of a universe where everything turns in circles (92).

The desire for unity is thus a basic human desire and contains its own poetry, which is captured in the scene in which Paul Eluard recites his poems about joy and brotherhood in Prague in June 1950, the scene which immediately follows Kundera's narration of his expulsion from the party. The historical and autobiographical are joined in the fictional and the fantastical, pushing the novel to its first structural climax. Kundera is described to watch the dancing of Eluard and the youngsters with envy and yearning, and as the 'splendid wreath of bodies' glided over the city, Kundera 'realized with anguish in my

hear that they were flying like birds and I was falling like a stone, that they had wings and I would never have any' (95).

The autobiographical anecdotes in Part Three were not constructed to glorify the author's past, or to achieve unity between his past and present self. Kundera does not describe himself as free from the psychological mechanism he criticizes, and the acknowledgement between himself and others strengthens his critique and endows his autobiography with stronger emotional resonance. The theme of laughter is elaborated through the alternation of fiction and autobiography in the rest of Part Three, while one of the major incidents of Kundera's life – his decision to leave Czechoslovakia – is narrated with irony and sorrows at the same time. Demonic laughter is born as Kundera returns to the story of Michelle and Gabrille, when the Jewish girl Sarah goes on stage and kicks the girls from behind during their presentation of *Rhinoceos*. The class bursts into laughter over the absurdity of the situation, while Madam Raphael laughs as she mistakes the incident as a calculated move in the presentation. The laughter turns angelic as the teacher and the two students are joined in their ring dance, and shortly they rise up to and through the ceiling, leaving the dumbfounded students on the ground, hearing 'the fading, radiant laughter of three archangels' (104). Kundera's fictionalization of the theme of laughter here is packed with a lot of irony and malice, yet the readers witness how this laughter is turned against Kundera in the next section when his identity as the astrology writer was disclosed and his friend R lost his job. As the two talked about the editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine, who had spent three years in Moscow studying Marxism-Leninism and had his horoscope cast by Kundera. Though thoroughly distressed, R laughed and for Kundera:

> ...it rang in my ears like a tentative promise of salvation. For it was just this laughter I wanted to hear when I wrote those silly articles on Pisces, Virgo, and Aries, it was just this laughter I imagined as my reward, but it never reached me, not from anywhere, because in the meantime throughout the world the angels occupied all positions of authority...(100)

The autobiography of Kundera was determined by the world he was in at this point, since he understood he could no longer remain in the country. His desire to rape R, during their meeting, was merely a desperate effort to grab something in the midst of falling:

> Because since they expelled me from the ring dance, I have not stopped falling, I am still falling...farther and farther away from my country into the desert of a world where the fearsome laughter of the angels rings out, drowning all my words with its jangle.
>
> I know that Sarah exists somewhere. Sarah the Jewish girl, Sarah my sister, but where will I find her? (106).

Sarah is the character who induces laughter in Part Three, as well as in Old Testament. In the book of Genesis, Abraham is the titular father of the Jews. Abraham and Sarah laugh at God's promise of Sarah giving birth in her old age, and the son who is born is named Isaac, Hebrew for 'he laughs' or 'laughter' (Misurella 31). Part Three ends with Kundera's calling for the fictive self with whom he could have real unity – the rebellion against the monologic universe of the angels.

The unity between Kundera and his others, as we see in Part Six, also titled 'The Angels', is created by the joining of autobiography and fiction and Kundera's desire to

understand 'the interior world of their infinitude of possibilities' in his other selves in the novel (227). The collapse of boundary between self and others is made possible by Kundera's nostalgia for his lost homeland and his past, as the yearning transforms itself into an 'inner intensity that abolishes the borderline between the fantastic and the real, muddles time' (Banjeree 143). The reversal of mental perspectives is illumined at the beginning of a quasi-autobiographical narrative in Part Five:

> [From] the Breton town of Rennes…I am watching them from the height of my lookout, but the distance is too great. Fortunately, there is a tear in my eye, which, like a telescope lens, brings me nearer to their faces…I see them all against the backdrop of the luminous Prague of fifteen years ago (176).

The same breakdown of perspectives governs the invention of Tamina, as Kundera emphasizes Tamina is originally from Prague but leaves anonymous the town where her story takes place. As Kundera's alter-ego, the keyword for Tamina's self is memory – she is the central investigation of the difficulties of self-preservation, and the double descent to death of Tamina and Kundera's father is the author's examination of forgetting as both an organized and organic process. The existence of self, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, depends on memory. Tamina's life with her husband was recorded in a diary and notebooks that remain in Prague, which Tamina cherishes despite some of the unpleasant moments they have recorded:

> She does not want to give back to the past its poetry. She wants to give back to it its lost body. What is urging her on is not a desire for beauty. It is a desire for life.

> For Tamina is adrift on a raft and looking back, looking only back. Her entire being contains only what she sees there, far behind her. Just as her past contracts, disintegrates, dissolves, so Tamina is shrinking and losing her contours. ...if the tottering structure of her memories collapses like a clumsily pitched tent, all that Tamina will be left with is the present, the invisible point, that nothingness moving slowly toward death (119).

If one of the tasks of autobiography is to preserve the past in order to give meaning to the present, Tamina comes closest to being a genuine autobiographer out of all the characters in the novel. She is, in Charles Molesworth's words, the 'embodiment of [Kundera's] vision of redemptive interiority' (Molesworth 236). Unlike the graphomaniacs in Part Three, Tamina is aware of how her experience would cease to be hers once her notebooks are read by others: '[the] striking similarity that would nonetheless remain between her and the author of the notes would have the effect of parody, of mockery' (140). Kundera's narration of Tamina's thoughts reminds one of the problem of split intentionality in the autobiographical genre, though it is also an indirect critique on the ego-centricism of the graphomaniacs and characters as Mirek. Autobiographers who are absorbed in their selves fail to realize their writings do not exemplify their interiority, and the lack of awareness between their writing selves and the written selves amplify their self-absorption more than their significance.

While the preservation of oneself in writing becomes increasing difficult in a world where the individual is constantly overwhelmed by others, one is also gradually defeated by the erosion of memory. The erosion of memory informs the tragedy of

Tamina in Part Six, which is identified with that of Kundera's father and that of Czechoslovakia under totalitarian rule. As Kundera writes:

> The silence of my father, from whom all words slipped away, the silence of the hundred forty-five historians, who have been forbidden to remember, that multiple silence resounding through Bohemia, forms the background of the picture I am painting of Tamina (221).

The loss of memory is the beginning of the end of self in the same manner as the demand for unity. In Part Three, the readers witness Tamina's failure in recalling several of the nicknames Pavel gave her during different periods of their marriages, and thus some of her earlier identities or selves[vii]. Her history is recorded in diary and notebooks, non-fictional serial forms which allow contradictions to coexist without assimilating the dissonance (Nussbaum 130). The self has to be preserved in all its differences and contradictions, and Tamina meets her death as she gives up on retrieving her memories of her husband. Czechoslovakia also headed towards its possible death in Kundera's conception, as the self of the nation was constantly destroyed and reinvented. Part Six, 'The Angels', again opens with the historical event of Czechoslovakia in 1948. The vacancy of Clementis is filled by the ghost of Kafka in the opening section of Part Six, who Kundera calls 'the prophet of a world without memory' (217). In Kafka's novel, Prague is a city without memory and humans have lost continuity with their humanity: no one remembers anything in a city without names, or with names that are different from what they were yesterday; people without a name are people without a past since there is no link between their present and their past. The self of Czechoslovakia was re-invented whenever a different power seized the country: the street Tamina's family lived on went

through five names from the day Tamina's father was born to the time Tamina got married. The loss of memory, as Ellen Pifer points out in his discussion of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, is also the loss of the source of individual identity. It is through language that we name or identify not only things but ourselves. Identity, like meaning in a text, arises from difference: and the ability to differentiate one word from another—or one thing, one event, one person, one author, one culture from another—depends on memory. Memory of the past, recorded as history, keeps alive our sense of differentiation and identity (Pifer 87-8).

The end of self is as inevitable as forgetting, which plays the lesser twin of death. Another major incident of Kundera's life – the death of his father – is narrated through the alternation of autobiography and fiction. The diminishing self of Kundera's father is, like Kundera's in Part Three, the basis of the fictions of other selves. Kundera's father struggled against the loss of language during the last years of his life, and is described to ride his horse in fever for days before his death. Tamina is invited to forget her forgetting of her husband and their love, by a young man called Raphael. Raphael is the name of an angel who leads people to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness (Jones 310). Tamina embarks on her journey towards forgetting as she gets into a red sports car, which recalls the red sports car of the police who arrests Mirek. Kundera's father died when organized forgetting in Czechoslovakia was at its full swings, exemplified by the half autobiographical, half fictional episode in which Husak, who Kundera calls the President of Forgetting, was made an Honorary Pioneer by the children. On the children island, Tamina loses her name and her status as an adult as she joins all the games of the children. Her memory fades and she enters the realm of absolute forgetting, as she gives

up the privacy of her body. Her body is shared with the children, and her sexuality is reduced to a small toy for the production of physical pleasure. The primeval state Tamina regresses into is an allegory of the idiocy Czech people were lured into in the age of amnesia, as they fell prey to the rejoicing of 'agreement with being' aforementioned in this chapter (248). The loss of memory, in this context, has its root in mankind. Totalitarian control in Czechoslovakia is the mobilization of such desire, and the children island is a fantastical manifestation of the same scenario. Unity of self across time is guaranteed by erasing earlier identities, and also by obliterating individuals who are not in unison with the idyll. Tamina is haunted and abused on the children island as she stops joining their games and attempts to fight back. In Kundera's narration, Tamina becomes 'the cement of [the children's] brotherhood' and the tool of their glorifying their own world and its laws (255). Such ego-centricism harkens back to Mirek's autobiographical act, for whom the world of others is simply the stage for his self-glorification, and whoever does not fit into the picture could be airbrushed out of existence. Death is the ultimate agreement or unity one can achieve with oneself: all conflicts cease at the moment of death. For those who celebrate the expression of being rejoicing being, such as Saint Annie Leclerc (as Kundera mockingly refers to), even death 'is a part of joy' (80).

The boundary between public and private is invalidated in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, since the fate of one's nation is governed by the same mechanism as the fate of oneself. The autobiographies of the individuals are ultimately determined by the world they are situated in – a world in which the external determines overwhelm one's

internal impulses. The boundary between self and world does not exist for characters as Mirek and the graphomaniacs as others do not exist for them, while it collapses for Kundera as he incorporates his own story in those of his characters and vice versa. By paralleling the stories of his characters with his own, Kundera gives a strong sense of unity and validity to the whole: the readers can see that what did not happen is as revealing and in a sense, as true as what did happen (Eagle 155). The understanding of one self or an existential situation requires and entails the understanding of another, and Kundera's autobiography revolves around the loss of his beloved father's self and the possible end of Czechoslovakia's self. The story of Tamina provides the link between the two, and the agent through which Kundera explores the essence of forgetting as an existential situation. The interaction between self and the world is crucial to Kundera's autobiographical strategy, because it is the means by which he comes to terms with the impossibility of reaching, of preserving the infinitude within his father:

> Man knows he cannot embrace the universe with its suns and stars. Much more unbearable is for him to be condemned to lack the other infinitude, that infinitude near at hand, within reach. Tamina lacked the infinitude of her love, I lacked Papa, and all of us are lacking in our work because in pursuit of perfection we go toward the core of the matter but never quite get to it.
>
> That the infinitude of the exterior world escapes us we accept as natural. But we reproach ourselves until the end of our lives for lacking that other infinitude. We ponder the infinitude of the stars but are unconcerned about the infinitude our papa has within him.

> It is not surprising that in his later years variations became the favorite forms for Beethoven, who knew all too well (as Tamina and I know) that there is nothing more unbearable than lacking the being we loved, those sixteen measures and the interior world of their infinitude of possibilities (226-7).

The use of variations, as the form of the novel, represents Kundera's attempt to understand the self of his father, which the son never reached when the father was alive. During his last years Kundera's father worked on Beethoven's sonatas and attempting to understand the meaning behind the use of variations. Kundera never managed to retrieve the answer from the 'wordless infinitude' in his father's speech, who lost all power of speech towards the end of his life (220). His self-reproaches, as Kundera states in section seven, are parallels to Tamina's over her forgetting of her husband. The self continue to slip away from those who struggle to reach it – Pavel's from Tamina, Kundera's father's for Kundera. One could only continue to search for the self in all possible spheres, and only memory would keep it alive. Memories of love come back to Tamina before she starts her journey to the children island. Although Tamina realizes her husband is still alive in her sadness and she must search for him all over the world, both Pavel's and Tamina's self diminish once she descends into the realm of forgetting. Kundera's father's self is forever gone from Kundera, who could continue to grasp it through writing. One way of grasping the self of his father, for Kundera, is to explore variation form as the voyage to the 'infinite diversity of the interior world lying hidden in all things' (226). The son and the father are joined in their understanding of the form, which forms a part of the construction of Kundera's self in the novel. The boundary between past and present, between autobiographical and fictional, between historical and fantastical is again

abolished by the inner intensity of Kundera, as the novel comes to its second structural climax near the end of Part Six. In a quasi-autobiographical narrative, Kundera recounts the scene of his father dying for the last time in the novel. He could still hear Husak's words coming to him 'through the flowering apple trees' from eight years ago, and his words consist of quotations from Annie Leclerc's essay on laughter being the expression of rejoicing of being in being (256). Sunny smiles of the children are refracted in Husak's tears of emotions, which creates a great miracle of a rainbow over Prague. Fiction brings Kundera in contact not only with his past self, but with his father's and the self of Czechoslovakia. The forgetting of being is temporarily postponed as Kundera recaptures the moment when forgetting as manifests itself in both the realms of the individual and the world as an existential situation. The preservation of selves has its ground in the novelist's creation of a textual universe comprised by different genres, breaking the boundary between the infinitude of the exterior and that of the interior.

The success of the invention of selves, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, rests in Kundera's concern for both interiority and variety of the self. The story of autobiographer is told in relation to his fictive others, and the autobiographical is illumined through the fictions of other selves in the novel. The synthesis between self and the world is achieved by the creation of a textual universe inhibited by all selves, as the self and others share the same experience. The understanding of self comes from the understanding of the world, and on establishing the connections between the two. The same dialectic governs *The Invention of Solitude*, in which the stories about oneself and others convey the same truth about the autobiographer. The memoir is an inter-text of all

texts that have become a part of the subjectivity of the author, while the self and the world come into a synthesis as individual and collective consciousness merge in one's memories. The fictions of selves are endowed with the power of establishing human kinship, as one speaks of oneself as another in one's story or lets one's story speak through the stories of others. The key to self-understanding and self-revelation is thus *je est un autre*.

Chapter Four

Self as Others/Je est un autre

The presentation of self – the interiority of the writer or a character – is achieved through the use of multiple selves in the autobiographical fictions I have discussed in the last chapters. This interiority is often inaccessible to the writer because the self, as I put it in my discussion on *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, forever slips away from those who want to reach it. One is also deceived by the illusion of proximity: one believes one understands his/her self at moments of self-absorption, in the same way one fails to look into the self of one's beloved at moments of intimacy. The understanding of self is essentially an impossible task, as one could not see all facets of self at the same time, while self is a continual unfolding at a pace beyond one's keeping, and the only certainty about the self – and life – is death.

In *The Invention of Solitude*, Paul Auster depicts the search for a father whose self is inaccessible both in life and in death, and the search of his own self in the connections between his own self and other selves in the memoir. In the first part, 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', the knowledge of self could only be traced in fragmentation. When unity of self is an impossibility, the subject of the auto/biographical project unfolds as a series of contradictions, and the essence of self remains incommunicable. The second part, 'The Book of Memory', constructs a self that comes into being through its collusions with the others, while the text itself is a collaborative effort of Auster and the other selves in the narrative. The various selves – autobiographical, fictional, historical, biblical – share the same solitary consciousness Auster creates and re-creates in his memoirs. The notion of *je est un autre* is elaborated in Auster's autobiography, in which the self-scrutiny

depends on the distance between the writing persona and the written self. It is also manifested in his use of 'mirror texts': the fictions of oneself is told through the fictions of others, as the parallels between the two illuminate the creative process of the memoir. The selves in both parts are constructed to pinpoint the relationality of self, and the idea that the self is essentially a composite, an inter-subjectivity of all others that constitute it. The examination of one's self leads to one's immersion in the world, and the autobiographical narrative transcends its limit as a single-voiced discourse, affirming the significance of writing about the self.

The nature of referentiality of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man' distinguishes its form as fictional biographical, since details are 'arranged within a self-referential system of utterance' (Schabert, quoted in Keener 160). Biographical facts, authorial comments, and references supplement one another. Together they convey a creative vision of the author's inner experience, his mental process of wrestling with the grief that necessitated the auto/biographical narrative. At the beginning of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', Auster recounts his immediate impulse in preserving his father's life, but recognizes his father's death as the latest installment in a lifelong absence (Eakin *How Our Lives Become Stories* 88). Having no family dependent on him, devoid of passion for anything or anyone, there is no one whose life would be altered by his absence. The self of Sam Auster eludes the world beyond his death since he never entered a real relationship with the world: 'He did not seem to be a man occupying space, but rather a block of impenetrable space in the form of a man. The world bounced off him, shattered against him, at times adhered to

him—but it never got through' (7). The nature of Sam Auster's life is summarized in the author's commentary on the relationship between his father and the family house:

> The point is: his life was not centered around the place where he lived. His house was just one of many stopping places in a restless, unmoored existence, and this lack of center had the effect of turning him into a perpetual outsider, a tourist of his own life (9).

The essence of Sam Auster's self, in this light, is his invisibility to both the world and himself. Such a self could hardly be said to exist, since self only exists in recognition by and in relation to others. In Auster's narration, the domain of the other was unreal to Sam Auster and his incursions into that domain were made with 'a part of himself he considered to be equally unreal' (15). The snapshots of Sam Auster as a bachelor show 'a man who finds life tolerable only by staying on the surface of himself', an automatic liar who talked about himself in the third person, whose truth no one would know about (17). What people saw was a surrogate self, while Sam Auster 'remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain' (16). The photographs of the author's parents recall the absence of affection Sam Auster showed at his son's birth as well as his grandson's. The distance between himself and his self, and the silence over his inner life in Sam Auster drives the author to the conclusion of the essence of his auto/biographical project as failure: one could not find the man within someone if it has eluded even that person himself, or construct a portrait of invisibility.

Auster's confession of failure justifies what would be otherwise an impossible task: the confession shifts the emphasis from narrative coalescence to the author's

struggle in his search. While the essence of the subject remains impossible to grasp, the self of Sam Auster is now constructed with the scattered evidence and the author's memories of his existence. The author poses as the other to his father, and attempts to trace the self of Sam Auster through his own perception. The recollection of the past, shared between father and son, takes the form of examination of the author's consciousness: from his earliest memories of his father's absence, to his later memory of craving for his father's attention. In between these memories of frustration and a later sense of disappointment was a brief moment of intimacy, when Sam Auster told the author a story when they were alone in the room, a story that seemed to explain the mysterious nature of Sam Auster but turned out to be fictional. In the back of the child's mind was a desire to impress his father, but his failure in the baseball match showed success would not have made any difference. The author was reminded of the distance between Sam Auster and him, who was defined for his father by what he was, and they were 'fixed in an unmovable relationship, cut off from each other on opposite sides of a wall' (24). Auster interrupts his narration and comments on the relationship between his father and the world, including himself in the picture:

> Like everything else in his life, he saw me only through the mists of his solitude, as if at several removes from himself. The world was a distant place for him, I think, a place he was never truly able to enter, and out there in the distance, among all the shadows that flitted past him, I was born, became his son, and grew up, as if I were just one more shadow, appearing and disappearing in a half-lit realm of his consciousness (24).

The author's attempt in reaching his father's inner world only exemplifies the gulf he has been trying to bridge and the certainty of failure: Auster realizes how he, as an other to his father, was unreal throughout the latter's life. Such realization turns the auto/biographical enterprise an increasingly difficult task, as the lack of relationality of their shared life surfaces. As the author begins to lose touch with what he is writing, words from Van Gogh offers consolation and enables Auster to write despite his grief:

> "Like everyone else, I feel the need of family and friendship, affection and friendly intercourse. I am not made of stone and iron, like a hydrant or a lamp-post"
>
> Perhaps this is what really counts: to arrive at the core of human feeling, in spite of evidence (28).

Fragmentation underlines the author's portrayal of his father, as Auster resorts to the 'tiniest of images' of his father in his memories, such as the image of father and son driving through downtown Newark, and the size of his father's hands. A violent display of emotions in Sam Auster comes into the picture, as the author returns to the family house as a representation of his father's mind. Sam Auster 'flew into an uncontrollable rage' when he found out the author and his wife had raised all the shades to let in the daylight during one of their stay at the house (31). Returning to his commentary, Auster describes his father's life as a constant effort in avoiding confrontation with an unstoppable force of fury within, by 'nurturing a kind of automatic behavior that would allow him to pass to the side of it' (31). If Auster has obtained a glimpse into the inner world of his father, it is only an insight into how Sam Auster disabled himself from feeling. The readers witness Auster's struggling in presenting the essence of his father's

nature, through 'the creation of a realizable system of images' (Dow 274). The creation turns out to be self-defeating, as hinted by the trick photograph of Sam Auster, reproduced within the text. The multiple images are surrounded by gloom and stillness, and the possibility of eye contact among the various selves is denied: 'Each one is condemned to go on staring into space…It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man'. The various portraits Auster has established of his father brings the author back to his starting point: the essence of Sam Auster's self remains invisible. The realization not only drives Auster to a second confession of the failure of his auto/biographical enterprise, but of the pain it inflicts on him, which threatens to defeat his original purpose of writing:

> There has been a wound, and I realize now that it is very deep. Instead of healing me as I thought it would, the act of writing has kept this wound open…
>
> I seems to be afflicted, cursed by some failure of mind to concentrate on what I am doing…Never before have I been so aware of the rift between thinking and writing (32).

The image of the distracted writing recalls an earlier image of Sam Auster: 'he seemed to lose his concentration, to forget where he was, as if he had lost the sense of his own continuity' (29). The author's investigation of Sam Auster's inability to feel has caused the same disability in himself. This second confession again gives the narrative a greater momentum by acknowledging its deficit. The focus of the story is the author's invention of his subject in his present consciousness, and the relationality of the shared life will be created through the son's attempt in understanding his father:

> I not only see him as he was, but as he is, as he will be…lying in the coffin underground, his body still intact, his fingernails and hair continuing to grow. A feeling that if I am to understand anything, I must penetrate this image of darkness, that I must enter the absolute darkness of earth (33).

The self of Sam Auster, comprised by different texts, unfolds between contradictions in the second half of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man'. While the use of different genres – letters from strangers, newspaper cuttings, autobiographical anecdotes, quotations – offers the author new insights into the personality of his father, it also confirms the impossibility of any unified knowledge of his subject. The nature of Sam Auster's self remains multiple and partly hidden from the author, as suggested by the only document of the history of Sam Auster's family. A photograph of his family taken when Sam was no more than a year old, it seems to convey an 'indestructible sense of the past' and turns out to be the opposite: Auster's grandfather, who died when Sam was seven, had been cut of the picture (33). The truth about this death was only uncovered by a chance meeting of Auster's cousin and a stranger, who provided the details in a cover letter and relevant newspaper articles. Reproduced in the narratives, they provide the details of the murder of Sam's father by his mother. The facts are portrayed in a sensational, flawed writing style of the media of the time, and are further undermined by fictional statements. While the extent of truth to the story – the first major and most traumatic incident of Sam Auster's life – remains unverifiable, the author could only speculate its effects on the formation of his father's self with the limited additional information offered by Sam Auster. The story of Auster's grandmother seizing the money

his father had saved for a bicycle was a typical scene of the latter's childhood. In the author's words: 'This was rule by caprice. For a child, it meant that the sky could fall on the top of him at any moment, that he could never be sure of anything. Therefore, he learned never to trust anyone. Not even himself...he learned not to want anything too much' (50). The insecurity created an irrational desire in Sam Auster for money as a means of protection, and Auster elaborates on a kind of 'perceptual primitivism' in his father's attitude: as everything was understood in terms of its function and its cost, Sam Auster denied himself 'intimate contact with the shapes and textures of the world' (53). Auster supports his commentary with a quotation from Marx about money being the 'bond of all *bonds*' and 'the universal agent *of separation*', and autobiographical anecdotes about the unwillingness to spend in his father (53, emphasis original).

Seeing his relationship with money as the key to the man behind the surrogate self, for a brief moment Auster seems to have achieved a relatively solid understanding of the self of his father. The use of further references, however, soon destroys the illusion of unified knowledge as Auster digs deeper into his memories and other references. Unlike the detached and petty man at home, Sam Auster was a kind, generous, soft-hearted landlord to his tenants, known as 'Mr. Sam'. Of all the evidence of Sam Auster's life the author found in the family house, he is happiest to have retrieved a letter from a previous tenant who wrote to repay from twelve years ago and thank Mr. Sam for his kindness to her family. The letter, reproduced in the narrative, serves as the living proof of Sam Auster's capacity of feeling, alongside Auster's personal testimonies of the shared moments between father and son. The author witnessed the tenants' affection towards his father when they collected rent, and the impression it left on him remains in his present

consciousness, 'as immediate as a splinter in the thumb' (58). Sam Auster came across as a light-hearted and affectionate father when Auster spilled tar over himself by accident, producing a moment of intimacy for the author: 'It had suddenly become possible for me to feel close to him' (59). A businessman and a work alcoholic, he disapproved of his son's occupation as a writer, but went to the public library to read the author's poetry. A helpful friend, a loving uncle, Sam Auster also made a caring father when he witnessed a transaction between Auster and a rich businessman and realized his son could take care of himself on his own terms. It remains impossible to conclude what a person Sam Auster was, or how he actually felt towards the author. Quotations from Issac Babel and Proust, about how an offspring's perceives his/her father as a distinctive individual and the best father in the world despite objective evidence, increase the author's confusion since he has obviously failed in both:

> The rampant, totally mystifying force of contradiction…Impossible to say anything without reservation: he was good, or he was bad; he was this, or he was that. All of them are true. At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men, each one distinct, each one a contradiction of all others. Fragments. Or the anecdote as a form of knowledge.
>
> Yes (61).

Contrary to the emphasis on a definite portrayal of the subject's personality in a conventional auto/biographical narrative, Auster suggests an alternative form for the enterprise: fragmentation as the faithful representation of life. The self of Sam Auster is constructed in its different facets in relation to various others in his life, which highlights the essentially multiple nature of self in any person, as the self is defined in relation to

various others at different moments. Knowledge is a slow accretion, a series of intellectual proximities in 'Portrait of an Invisible Man'. The story of the author's struggle in constructing the portrait gives substance to the story, since the story of the subject's self cannot be fully told. The author's reliance of deferral embodies his attempt in giving meaning to his auto/biographical act, which he confesses in his final commentary on the writing of the narrative:

> The closer I come to the end of what I am able to say, the more reluctant I am to say anything. I want to postpone the moment of ending, and in this way delude myself into thinking that I have only just begun, that the better part of my story still lies ahead. No matter how useless these words might seem to be, they have nevertheless stood between me and a silence that continues to terrify me. When I step into this silence, it will mean my father has vanished forever (65).

If Auster has come to see the essence of his father more than before during the writing of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', neither the essence of the self or the author's understanding could be communicated into words. While the self cannot be fully presented in writing, to stop writing is to stop re-creating the image of the self. The alternation of genres in the last pages of the narrative concludes the nature of life writing in *The Invention of Solitude*: to constantly re-create life in the present, and to endow writing with life-giving power that points to the future. Auster returns to the beginning of his search towards the end of the narrative: to understand the nature of his father's life through understanding the nature of his death. The truth of Sam Auster's life is finally unverifiable, as incorrect facts are printed in the obituary in the newspaper. Auster attempts to imagine the experience of a heart attack, to experience the same mortal pain

his father went through, but admits the impossibility of intimacy across in memories. The author's contemplation is interrupted by a brief passage by Kierkegaard: '...only he who descends into the underworld rescues the beloved...he who is willing to work gives birth to his father' (68). By penetrating the image of darkness, the image that governs both the life and death of Sam Auster, the author nevertheless recreates his father's self and saves him from obscurity. The auto/biographical enterprise also urges Auster to look to the future, to the life that will continue to grow: 'An image of Daniel now...of his sweet and ferocious little body, as he lies upstairs in his crib asleep. To end with this' (69). The interaction of the concluding passages and images of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man' illumines the subtle dialectic of the plot of *The Invention of Solitude*: Auster must continue to penetrate the image of darkness to save his father, in order to become a better son as well as a better father to his son, Daniel.

The impossibility of understanding and presenting the biographical subject in 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', for Auster, is related to the question of human understanding and biography in general: how problematic it is to presume to know anything about anyone else; how one might begin to speak about another person, and whether or not it is impossible (Auster *The Art of Hunger* 276). The self of Sam Auster is created by the author in 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', in the form of fragmentation and partial knowledge. Such creation is only made possible by the author's attempt in understanding the subjectivity of other – of his father's as a child, of Van Gogh's when the author himself wrestled with depression – in view of constant setbacks throughout the autobiographical project. The understanding of the self of Sam Auster thus depends on a

certain distance between the author and his others, and on the author establishing the connections between the two. In the universe in *The Invention of Solitude*, distance, instead of proximity, is the helpmate to intimacy. Sam Auster was only ever absent in his presence, and his self was only present in the son's mind as the author, with anguish, worked through his memories and other references.

The same formula applies to the understanding of self in the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, 'The Book of Memory', a consciously fictional and collective autobiographical narrative. The nature of referentiality of 'The Book of Memory' is illustrated in the opening pages of the narrative, as the readers witness the split intentionality of the autobiographer and the narrative as an inter-text. The understanding of one's self depends on distance, while the readers' understanding of the autobiographical self is enhanced by the double self-consciousness in the narrative. 'The Book of Memory' begins with the unnamed narrator failing to make sense of what he has written, and coming to the decision of referring to himself as 'A'. The picture of the autobiographer in motion demonstrates the paradox of self-abnegation I discussed in my introduction: the narrative's claim to referentiality lies in the recognition of the divorce between writing persona and the written self, and communication between me and myself is only possible as the 'I' becomes a 'he' (Renza 279). The narrator also has a fictive fictionality about his disguise, since he unmasks himself later in the narrative: 'he speaks of himself as another in order to tell the story of himself. He must make himself absent in order to find himself there' (154). 'The Book of Memory' is the title of the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, and also a recurrent refrain within the section, sub-divided into numerous separate books, at times taking a life of its own, which sometimes Auster

refers to as a separate entity (Adams 97). The readers, as well as Auster, are witnessing the consciousness of the narrator A, who contemplates over the form of his narrative as a mixture of references to himself and others:

> To follow with Bruno's notion that the structure of human thought corresponds to the structure of nature. And therefore to conclude that everything, in some sense, is connected with everything else.
>
> At the same time, as if running parallel to the above, a brief disquisition on the room. An image, for example, of a man sitting alone in a room. As in Pascal: "All the unhappiness of man stems from one thing only: that he is incapable of staying quietly in his room" (76).

The depiction of A's thoughts not only states the main themes of 'The Book of Memory', but also underlines the inter-subjectivity in the narrative. Both the recounting self and the recounted self in 'The Book of Memory' are fictions created by the author, and both of these selves are partly comprised of the consciousness of others. The recollection of A's life in his room in Book One of 'The Book of Memory' is a fictional manifestation of Pascal's statement: 'These four walls hold only the signs of his own disquiet, and in order to find some measure of peace in these surroundings, he must dig more and more deeply into himself' (79). The autobiographical self is also constructed in relation to its significant other in 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', since the second part of *The Invention of Solitude* is a continuation of the task that remains incomplete in the first part: to enter the realm of darkness in order to locate the self. A. is described to be constantly watching his own disappearance: 'as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole' (77). The

sense of discontinuity between himself and his self A suffers recalls the lack of center of Sam Auster: 'as if he were living somewhere to the side of himself—not really here, but not anywhere else either' (78). To heal the wound inflicted by his father's absence, one that is inflamed by the writing of 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', the son must experience the same solitude in darkness, to expel the void and locate oneself in the world he is in: 'Only one thing is certain: he cannot be anywhere until he is here' (79).

Confinement is a kind of exile, a theme supplemented by the references to Jonah, Gepetto, Pinocchio, Crusoe and George Oppen's phrase: 'the shipwreck of the singular' (79). Meanings are established as one sees the parallels between one's life and others', and writing begins when the self comes into interaction with other selves. In his first commentary on the nature of chance, A. narrates the story of his friend who rented the same Paris chamber de bonne his father had hidden out in more than twenty years ago. In the subsequent autobiographical anecdote, A. comments how the story of his friend has no meaning, and yet this meaninglessness drives him to write: if chance, instead of destiny, governs one's life, all lives function according to the same randomness; a certain pattern, however, can be established in this randomness and writing is what endows life with meaning. The saying by Pascal is repeated and followed by a quotation from Desartes, written in his room in Amsterdam roughly the same time as Pascal's words entered *Pensees*: ' "Is there any country," he asked with exuberance, "in which one can enjoy freedom as enormously as one does here?'" The interaction of quotations forms a part of the anecdote of A. visiting Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam, in which A. pictured her writing in her room and her imaginary life in university, reading Descartes' *Meditations*, had she lived after the war. The coincidences confirm A's belief in the inter-

relatedness between all things, which creates a moment of illumination for A: 'he suddenly found himself crying...as if purely in response to the world. It was at that moment, he later realized, that The Book of Memory began' (83). The immersion of self in the world takes place during solitary wandering, and the depiction of A.'s as a wanderer in Amsterdam comes across as an allusion to Thoreau's writing on solitude and relations in Walden:

> Cut off from everything that was unfamiliar to him, unable to discover even a single point of reference, he saw that his steps, by taking him nowhere, were taking him nowhere but into himself. He was wandering inside himself, and he was lost. Far from troubling him, this state of being lost became a source of happiness, of exhilaration...As if on the brink of some previously hidden knowledge, he breathed into his very bones and said to himself, almost triumphantly: I am lost (87).

In a similar vein, Thoreau declares in 'The Village' in *Walden*, that 'not till we are completely lost...not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realizes where we are and the infinite extent of our relations' (217).

Solitude, rather than offering a stable ground of experience in a single autobiographical discourse, is constructed by both Thoreau and Auster as a means of connecting with the world through multiple, metamorphic selves (Ford 205). The understanding of relations between oneself and others translates itself into an integral part of the autobiographical experience, as self and world, like life and death, are one in the universe of 'The Book of Memory'. As one could experience the infinitude of one's interiority while being lost in the world, one could also glimpse into the infinitude of the

exterior world in one's confinement. The force of parallel lives manifests itself in the next two books of 'The Book of Memory', and points to the breakdown of boundary between near and far, self and other, present and past. The infinitude of possibilities of the self is discussed in as A. recollects his friendship with S., a Russian composer who was perfectly content with his life in his small, dark room: everything he could possibly need was contained in that room, a miniature cosmology that was also the representation of his inner world. The image of S. in the room alludes to the image of A. as well as to the image of Sam Auster, while his thoughts and actions – his exclamation over the wonders of his time, and his arrangement of furniture in his room – reminded A. of Descartes' words and the life of Crusoe: 'shipwreck in the heart of the city' (91). S. endowed his life with meaning by working on a giant composition that would never be finished, and in A.'s narration, S.'s reliance on deferral is the means to the transcendence of self:

> ...what for another man might have led to an impasse of despair was for him a source of boundless, quixotic hope...To have conceived of something within the realm of possibility—a work that could have been finished, and therefore detached from himself—would have vitiated the enterprise. The point was to fall short, but to do so only in attempting the most outlandish thing he could conjure for himself. The end result, paradoxically, was humility, a way of gagging his own insignificance in relation to God. For only in the mind of God were such dreams as S.'s possible. But by dreaming in the way he did, S. had found a way of participating in all that was beyond him, of drawing several inches closer to the heart of the infinite (91-2).

The story of S. also illuminates on the possibility of transcending oneself for A. in the light of parallels between their lives: S was born in the same year as A.'s father did, while A. is the same age as S.'s younger son. Their relationship offers a kind of psychological compensation for A.'s for the absence of his own father, and A.'s failure in getting in touch with S. after Sam Auster's death was another example of constant deferral: to postpone the possibility of S.'s death, to preserve the memory of their bond in the same way as he defers the end of death of his father in the narrative. The intersection of lives could take place across time, between past and present, as further coincidences formed a part of their friendship: the picture of S. and A. shows the same evocation of friendship as a picture of S. as a young man alongside the son of Marina Tsvetayeva, who stands in A.'s mind as one of the greatest Russian poets. The death of her son, Mur, was recounted to A. and his wife by their former neighbor Dr. Altschuller. The grief over the death of a beloved other is elaborated in Book Four through references to various illustrations concerning the deaths of children: Rembrandt's son, Titus; Sir Walter Raleigh and his son Wat; Anne Frank; Mur; the children of Cambodia and Atlanta who suffered from famine. The images of sorrows and loss paint the background for the main autobiographical stories in 'The Book of Memory': the illness of A.'s son, Daniel, who could have died if A. and his wife had not taken him to the doctor in time; and the death of A.'s grandfather. A. resorts to one of his textual others in order to exorcise the panic he experienced when Daniel's life was in danger, by returning to his earlier translations of the fragments written by Mallarme at the bedside of his dying son, Anatole:

> ...it was a way for him to relive his own moment of panic in the doctor's office: it is too much for me. I cannot face it. for it was only at that moment...that

> he had finally grasped the full scope of his own fatherhood: the boy's life meant more than his own; if dying was necessary to save his son, he would be willing to die...Translating those forty or so fragments by Mallarme...had become the equivalent of offering a prayer of thanks for the life of his son (110).

The fragments, reproduced in 'The Book of Memory', communicate the sadness of Mallarme as well as those of all others who lost their beloved ones. The transcendence of one's sorrows happens at a moment of empathy, of experiencing what others have experienced; the dialogue between the past and the present sorrows of the world, one that is established by the story of Daniel's illness, also highlights the importance of hope for A.:

> A. looks at his son and realizes he must not allow himself to despair. There is this responsibility for a young life, and that he has brought this life into being. Minute by minute, hour by hour, as he remains in the presence of his son...giving himself up to this young life, which is a continual injunction to remain in the present, he feels his despair evaporate' (156-7).

The theme of devotion to living, to engaging oneself in life despite its apparent despairs is supplemented by the story of A.'s grandfather: a man of 'bizarre and grandiose optimisms', an amateur magician, A.'s grandfather was someone who lived his life as if it was magic and delighted people into believing in make-believe. Even in his deathbed, A.'s grandfather would never mention the possibility of death and devoted his energy to remembering his past and prolonging his life. A. ends the portrait of his grandfather by the image of himself rejoicing over in being: 'He finds it extraordinary, even in the ordinary actuality of his experience, to feel his feet on the ground, to feel his lungs

expanding' (121). Being alive is a source of joy in itself, if death owns life all along and can claim life at any moment. The capacity in engaging oneself in illusory hopes is essential to living as well as to the writing of *The Invention of Solitude*: one lives and writes despite the certainty of death and failure, and meaning is asserted by one delighting in the act of living and writing.

The nature of the autobiographical narrative and self in 'The Book of Memory', in the light of the above discussion, would echo Michael Sprinker's formulation of subjectivity that I referred to in Chapter One: every text is an articulation of the relations between texts and every self is the articulation of an intersubjectivity , a waving together of what has been produced elsewhere in discontinuous points in at any moment in time (Sprinker 325). The narrative's claim to referentiality is strengthened as the author recognizes his self as a composite, and lets the various voices that inhibit his self speak through him in 'The Book of Memory'. Collective experience is preserved in the memoirs of individual experience, while the author's self changes as it interacts with other selves. A similar dialectic directs the rest of narrative, in which the story of self is told through the stories of others. The autobiographical self is constituted by other fictive selves in the text, and the autobiographical truth is only communicable through allusions. The theme of *je est un autre* is illuminated by Auster's use of 'mirror texts' – tales of solitary darkness, of one's search of the father. Auster's commentary on the first of these mirror texts, The Book of Johan, is an expression of his own authorial statements about the writing of 'The Book of Memory':

> This brief work...written in the third person, is more dramatically a story of solitude than anything else in the Bible, and yet is told as if from outside that solitude, as if, by plunging into the darkness of that solitude, the "I" has vanished from itself. It cannot speak about itself, therefore, except as another. As in Rimbaud's phrase: "Je est un autre" (124).

The story of Johan, for Auster, symbolizes the impossibility of speaking the truth: the prophecy would only remain true if Johan would not speak about the destruction of the Ninevites, who would repent and be spared if they had been delivered God's message. The second mirror text, the poem *Cassandra*, also embodies a similar paradox: the truth is destined never to be believed, and would be true if it remains untold. The truth could only be alluded to, and is only born in the silence and the darkness of solitude: both Johan and Lord Royston, the author of the English translation of *Cassandra*, met the doom of the shipwreck. The whale of the belly turned out to mean Johan's deliverance instead of his death, as he finally cried out to God: 'In the darkness of solitude, the tongue is finally loosened, and at the moment it begins to speak, there is an answer. And even if there is no answer, the man has begun to speak' (125-6).

The descent to the darkness of death is thus the rite to rebirth, and one must begin to speak despite the uncertainty of deliverance. This is the same paradox lies at the heart of Auster's search for his father: the son must enter the realm of darkness and save the father in order to become a better son. The author's effort is what vitiates the autobiographical act, despite the impossibility of grasping the truth of his father's self. The answer lies in the future as Auster becomes a better father to his son, and realizes both the possibilities of his fatherhood and self-hood. The main mirror text to *The*

Invention of Solitude is the story of *Pinocchio*, a tale about the taking hold of the self: through adventures, mischief, progress and setbacks, the puppet comes to a gradual dawning of conscience, an awareness of what he wants to become. In order to become a real boy, he must save his father from the darkness of the belly of the Terrible Shark, and swim through the desolate water (131-2). The story of *Pinocchio* manifests the gist of the creation of *The Invention of Solitude*, and the parallels are highlighted as the narration returns to A. reading the story to his son, Daniel:

> A. has watched his son's face carefully during these readings of Pinocchio. He has concluded that it is the image of Pinocchio saving Gepetto that gives the story meaning for him…for the boy to see Pinocchio…who is not even a real boy, to become the figure of redemption, the very being who saves his father from the grip of death, is a sublime moment of revelation. The son saves the father. This must be fully imagined from the perspective of the little boy. And this, in the mind of the father who was once a little boy, a son, that is, to his own father, must be fully imagined. *Puer aeternus*. The son saves the father (133-4).

The grasping of one's self-hood – both as a father to his son and a son to his father – comes from understanding the selves of both his textual other and significant other in real life. The presence of one's self in writing is created in the use of a surrogate self, from instilling the autobiographical into the fictional. In a later commentary on the writing of *Pinocchio*, Auster suggests the book was for Collodi's a book of memory, and the conception of Pinocchio as Collodi's double describes the creative process of *The Invention of Solitude*: 'To dip the puppet into the inkwell, therefore, was to use his creation to write the story of himself. For it is only in the darkness of solitude that the

work of memory begins' (164). The use of mirror texts, as well as story-telling, is elevated to the 'means of establishing or re-establishing human kinship' in 'The Book of Memory' (Brooker 158). The power of fiction lies in its ability in breaking down one's absorption in oneself and one's solitude: 'A story…break down those walls. For it posits the existence of others and allows the listener to come into contact with them—if only in his thoughts' (152). Story telling is the key to resurrection in the another important mirror text to 'The Book of Memory', *The Thousands and One Nights*: Sherhad risks her life to tell the stories about death, and saves her life as well as those of all the daughters' in the kingdom. Speaking is again the beginning of one's deliverance, and the truth of one's story – the preservation of lives – is only alluded to in the stories of one's grief over the loss of a beloved other.

The use of mirror texts in 'The Book of Memory' is not limited to literary texts but includes paintings and pictures. Although none of them is reproduced in the narrative, Auster nevertheless gives them the same importance with detailed description, turning them into fictional illustrations. The use of references to other artworks as the representation of one's emotional state touches on the nature of self in the autobiographical narrative: what constitutes this interiority that is regarded as the self of the autobiographer? Is this interiority the referent to the written self in the text, or is it created by the act of constructing a self in the narrative? The story of A.'s life, and the essence of his self, is solitude: 'everything he is trying to record in The Book of Memory, everything he has written so far, is no more than the translation of a moment or two of his life—those moments he lived through on Christmas Eve, 1979, in his room at 6 Varick street' (136). The inner intensity created by those moments of inwardness, by the solitary

darkness, motivates A. to seek tangible representation of his emotional state in works of arts. The self of A. experiences its important change as A. visited Van Gogh Museum and attempted to inhibit the room presented on the canvas *The Bedroom*:

> ...he began to experience it as a prison, an impossible space...not so much of a place to live, but of the mind that has been forced to live there...Stifled among the furniture and everyday objects of the room, you begin to hear a cry of suffering in this painting...But there is no answer...The main in this painting (and this is a self-portrait, no different from a picture of a man's face, with eyes, nose, lips and jaw) has been alone too much, has struggled too much in the depths of solitude. The world ends at that barricaded door. For the room is not a representation of solitude, it is the substance of solitude itself (142-3).

The depiction echoes the opening images of 'The Book of Memory': A. trying to locate himself in confinement and presenting his self in the writing about the room. The reference to *The Bedroom* is an illumination of a change in the autobiographical self as A. inhibits the painter's solitude and realizes that there is a limit to the solitude one can endure. One must reach out of this solitude – of one's self – to be in touch with others and the world. The re-invention of the solitude of Van Gogh is also an act of entering someone else's solitude for A.: once a solitude has been breached, it becomes a kind of companionship (136). Solitude is the force that enables one to realizes one' connections with others, and claim someone else's experience as one's own, thus transcending the limit of individual consciousness.

The change in nature of autobiographical experience, in 'The Book of Memory', is also parallel to the change in the nature of memory in the narrative: the continuance of

self depends on memory, and individual memories turn collective as one recognizes the merging of individual and collective consciousness:

> 'Memory, therefore, not simply as the resurrection of one's private past, but an immersion in the past of others...Everything, therefore, is present in his mind at once, as if each element were reflecting the light of all the others...If there is any reason for him to be in this room now, it is because there is something inside him hungering to see it all at once...And yet, the telling of it is necessarily slow, a delicate business of trying to remember what has already been remembered (139).

Both collective and individual memories, being a part of each other, is immeasurable for the individual. The vastness of memory is pinpointed in the quotation from Augustine:

> Although it is a part of my nature, I cannot understand all that I am. This means, then, that the mind is too narrow to contain itself entirely. But where is that part of it which it does not contain? Is it somewhere outside and not within it? how, then, can it be a part of it, if it is not contained in it? (89).

Auster's answer is that one's memories are scattered around the world, and the experience of oneself and that of the world could become one in one's consciousness. In an autobiographical anecdote, A. recounts how his son recalled a past incident from three or four months ago, as they walked past the same spot:

> It occurred to A. that if in some sense the world imprints itself on our minds, it is equally true that our experience are imprinted on the world. For that brief moment as they walked by the pizza parlor, the boy was literally seeing his own past...To wander about in the world, then, is also to wander in ourselves.

> That is to say, the moment we step into the space of memory, we walk into the world (166).

On the other hand, if there is no difference between seeing and remembering, memory is not so much as the past contained within us, but as proof of our life in the present: 'If a man is to be truly present among his surroundings…He must forget himself in order to be there. And from that forgetfulness arises the power of memory. It is a way of living one's life so that nothing is ever lost' (128).

If the major task of the autobiographical narrative is the preservation of one's past and self, Auster commentary suggests one must forget the self as the center of one's consciousness but immerse oneself in the world. The self is preserved in the merging of consciousness – the infinitude of the exterior world and that of one's interior world. The barrier between self and world, near and far, present and past is again invalidated, and the act of remembering is what postpones the entrance of death in one's life. In the concluding pages of 'The Book of Memory', A. narrates himself remembering his childhood as a way of reliving his perception of the world. Not long after he concludes his recollection with the phrase 'this was the only thing [his mother] could remember', A. dreams of himself having to die, to face death as an imminent certainty (169). The autobiographer must continue to remember and to write, and the preservation of one's life could also mean the preservation of collective lives. The act of writing, in the world in *The Invention of Solitude,* is an act of violating space. 'The Book of Memory', as an independent entity within Auster's memoirs, is concluded with the lines from a letter by Nadezhda Mandelstam to his wife dated 1938, supposedly written before his death and was never sent:

> I have no words, my darling, to write this letter…I am writing into empty space. Perhaps you will come back and not find me here. Then this is what you will have left to remember by…Life can last so long. How hard and long for each of us to die alone (171).

Auster's perception of writing as a violation of space is not only the means of breaking down the boundary between himself and his others in the text, but also an attempt in entering the solitude of his father, who was described 'a block of impenetrable space' at the beginning of *The Invention of Solitude* (7). The son is forever committed to his attempt in entering the solitude of his father, in understanding the self within. The distance between the living and deceased is bridged – between the son and his father, as well as between Auster and his others in the text – by the act of writing. The invention of solitude – the reconstruction of one's self in writing – must continue for the writer. The autobiographical self is created as an inter-subjectivity of all others that comprise the self, and the mission of the autobiographer is to present this shared consciousness in his memoirs. One must always go back to the beginning and continually create the self, as depicted in the image on the last page of *The Invention of Solitude*: 'He finds a fresh sheet of paper. He lays it out on the table before him and writes these words with his pen. It was. It will never be again. Remember' (172).

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The notion *je est un autre* has drawn me to the study of the issue of self-presence and self-creation in autobiographical writings, as I believed it embodies the heart of the writing about oneself: self, as an interiority with the writer, could never be communicated in the narrative except as a fiction, as an 'other' one intends as he writes, as Renza puts it (292). The distance between oneself and his/her self, as I have argued throughout this thesis, plays an important role in presentation of the self in the text. The authors of my chosen texts explicitly turn their selves into fictions in their autobiographical narratives, as the means to communication between themselves and the readers. The extent of truth these selves lay claim to remains uncertain, though one could never obtain the answer to the same question in any piece of autobiographical writing. If the self is a continual unfolding even within the autobiographer, the glimpse the readers are offered is indeed only the truth of the autobiographer at the moment of writing; and in the autobiographical fictions I have chosen for this study, this moment of truth needs to be recognized as the truth of the moment or at certain moments, instead of the means of conferring unity on the self across time.

The notion *je est un autre* has also inspired a major part of my argument in that for me, the communication between a writer and his/her readers must have been grounded in the communication between oneself and his/her self within the autobiographer. The presence of others is crucial to the presence of one's self in the autobiographical fictions discussed in this study: in the parodies in *The Facts* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, those who fail to acknowledge the presence of others

in their autobiographical universes ultimately undermine the presence or even the existence of their selves. The relationship between self and the world has been an recurrent focus in autobiographical criticism throughout the contextualization of autobiography and individualism, to the emphasis on relationality of self: the self is necessarily the center of the universe for the individual, but the individual must not forget the formative forces on the self by the exterior world and by all others in his life. In *The Invention of Solitude*, the autobiographical self transcends the limit of one's self by seeking connections with other selves across space and time, and the study of one self is also the study of the world. Such a transcendent subject reminds one of Olney's transcendental subjectivism I referred to in Chapter One, though one distinction has to be made: in Auster's universe, the self is transcend as it recognizes both the parallels between one's self and nature, as well as how the self is comprised by others; while in Olney's conception, such as in *Metaphors of Self*, which I quoted from in my introduction, the self and the world are one while universe is essentially seen as a vast projection of individual selves (49-50).

The synthesis between self and the world also acquires a different meaning in the autobiographical fictions I study in this thesis: it is achieved through the interaction of the autobiographical selves and their fictional others in the texts. The unity between the author and his/her character, I believe, offers a kind of understanding and sympathy a writer would look for from his/her imaginary and distant readers: the understanding from a fellow human who has had the same experience as oneself has. In his article, 'Full of Life Now, Barret J. Mandel' argues that readers turn to autobiography for confirmation of his/her own perception of reality in terms of those experienced by another mortal, and

they turn to fictions as they for confirmation that there is value in playing, fantasizing, creating shape and order for their own sake (55). In the autobiographical fictions I have chosen, these two kinds of 'satisfaction', in Mandel's words, are offered to the readers at the same time as autobiography and fictions are joined in textual universes in which the autobiographers and their characters share the same experience, which the readers could also identify with. The writing of oneself, as Misch puts it, 'springs from the most natural source, the joy in self-communication and in enlisting the sympathetic understanding of others' (qtd. in Marcus 148). Such self-communication only has its value when there are others to understand, and this sympathetic understanding from others is what expels the naked solitude that often necessitates the writing of oneself.

Notes

Chapter Two

[i] See also *Deception: A Novel* (1990), *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991) and *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993). Philip Roth appears as Philip in *Deception*, a novel about the deceptions one's imagination is willing to commit in order to create selves and others. *Patrimony* is a memoir about the death of Roth's father. In *Operation Shylock*, the narrator Philip Roth meets a man who may or may not be Philip Roth. The 'other' Roth is on his mission to lead the Jews out of Israel and back to Europe, and the 'real' Roth has to stop him even if it means impersonating his impersonator.

[ii] Philip Lejeune, *On Autobiography*.

[iii] A collection of four works. *The Ghost Writer* (1979). *The Anatomy Lesson* (1981). *Zuckerman Unbound* (1983). *The Prague Orgy* (1985)

[iv] Zuckerman's demise happens in *Deception*, in which Philip Roth appears as Philip and discusses the death of his character with his mistress. Zuckerman's judgment about Roth being too nice in the mask of Philip will be proven wrong in the novel, since Philip in *Deception* deliberately invites other's judgment of him as 'bad' by his deceptions.

[v] See note 4.

Chapter Three

[vii] In the chapter on The Book of Laughter and Forgetting in her book Terminal *Paradox: The Novel of Milan Kundera*, Banjeree details Ionesco's conception of his play and discusses the similarities between *Rhinoceros* and section seven of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Ionesco has revealed that the source for his play was an account by Denis de Rougemount of a Nazi rally he witnessed in Nuremberg in 1948. When Hilter materalized and the crowd broke into a frenzy of enthusiasm, Rougement felt himself sucked into the vortex of mass hysteria, as if by the power of sacred horror. Ionesco was particularly struck by Rougemeont's observation that his successful resistance to the collective fanaticism came from the same irrational depth of being as the seduction, and not from his intellect. From this autobiographical sketch, Inoesco drew his conception of 'rhinoceritis'—an ideological epidemic of fanatical conformism that suddenly and universally spreads—as a fundamental defect of the imagination that takes cover under the illusion of logic. The image of Berenger at the end of Ionesco's last act, standing alone in a room where walls are crumbling under the butting horns of the beasts, trying to speak with a human voice over the roar of their trumpeting, finds a match in Kundera's text in the autobiographical section of the movement. The novel shows Kundera in his youth, a lonely dissenter roaming the festive streets of Prague when the government has just hanged the Czech surrealist Zavis Kalandra. All around Kundera, the angelic members of his generation are celebrating the victory of their murderous innocence by holding hands and dancing in a ring, with Paul Eluard as the grand master of the revels (Banjeree 160-1)

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